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**Strategic Approaches to Enhancing School Performance through
Instructional Leadership in Malaysia**

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Abstract

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) was employed in this study to suggest ways to enhance the performance of Malaysian schools. By relying on the opinions and consensus of experts, the study has tackled the problem of school performance using this technique. The nine suggestions for enhancing the school's performance were outlined in the summary of the experts' recommendations. Given that the NGT approach involves experts debating and voting on components derived from literature reviews, the validation of elements can be achieved straightforwardly.

Keywords: School performance; Instructional leadership; NGT technique

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1.0 Introduction

School performance has been a prominent research topic worldwide since the 1980s (Hanushek, 1989). In Malaysia, school performance is understood as a multifaceted concept that includes various indicators of success, such as student academic achievement, teacher effectiveness, and the overall school climate (Ahmad & Sulaiman, 2020; Azar & Adnan, 2020). High-performing schools typically exhibit strong student outcomes, such as high test scores and graduation rates, which reflect effective teaching and learning processes (Etim et al., 2020). Given this concern, exploring the factors influencing school performance has garnered significant attention in educational leadership and management studies. Instructional leadership has been recognized as a crucial factor in enhancing school performance. Although there is empirical evidence linking instructional leadership to school performance, substantial areas in the literature still require further investigation, particularly in non-Western contexts like Malaysia. While there have been studies on the pedagogical aspects of instructional leadership, only a few have formally investigated it as a predictor of school performance (Saad & Sankaran, 2021). Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the expanding body of Malaysian instructional leadership literature, addressing the lack of empirical studies in non-Western cultural and social contexts. This aligns with recommendations from previous research for more empirical queries into instructional leadership practices in Malaysia (Jalapang and Raman, 2020; Thien, 2022; Wahab et al., 2020; Wahab & Mustapha, 2020). Additionally, there is a need for more local studies to address the research gap, as most studies related to school performance have focused on secondary school and university students, with few conducted on primary school students.

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Given the aforementioned research gap, this study aims to achieve the following two objectives:

- To identify key strategies for improving school performance through instructional leadership in Malaysian schools as suggested by educational leadership experts.
- To provide recommendations for implementing these strategies in Malaysian schools.

2.0 Literature Review

The review of literature for this study focuses on the links between instructional leadership and school performance, as follows:

2.1 Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership is a fundamental concept in the realm of education, intricately linked to the overall performance and success of schools. At its core, instructional leadership revolves around the guidance, support, and direction provided by school leaders to enhance teaching and learning processes within educational institutions (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). It encompasses a range of practices and strategies aimed at improving instructional quality, fostering a positive school culture, and ultimately, elevating student outcomes (Bada et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2018). In the dynamic landscape of education, instructional leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of school performance. Effective instructional leaders not only set high academic standards but also work collaboratively with teachers to develop and implement innovative teaching methodologies, curriculum enhancements, and assessment practices tailored to meet the diverse needs of students (Bada et al., 2024). They serve as catalysts for continuous improvement, facilitating professional development opportunities and fostering a culture of reflection and growth among educators (Kemethofer & Warwas, 2022).

2.2 The relationship between instructional leadership and school performance

Instructional leadership is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various components essential for enhancing school performance. The primary components include setting a clear vision and goals, overseeing curriculum and instruction, promoting professional development, and fostering a positive school culture. These components significantly impact variables of school performance such as student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and overall school climate (Rodrigues & Ávila de Lima, 2024). Schools led by effective instructional leaders demonstrate higher levels of student attainment, increased teacher morale, and greater overall satisfaction within the learning community (Bellibaş et al., 2021). In this context, exploring the intricate interplay between instructional leadership and school performance not only offers insights into best practices for educational leadership but also provides a roadmap for cultivating thriving learning environments where every student has the opportunity to excel. Through this exploration, we can gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which instructional leadership shapes the educational landscape and propels schools toward excellence.

The study of Kilag and Sasan (2023) found that most principals rated themselves highly on instructional leadership dimensions, particularly in defining school missions and managing instructional programs. Additionally, teachers' assessments generally aligned with the principals' self-ratings but were slightly lower, indicating some discrepancies in perceived leadership effectiveness. This supports the study's hypothesis that schools led by principals with high instructional leadership scores perform better in terms of student achievement and teacher effectiveness. Moreover, these schools exhibited more positive climates, with fewer disciplinary issues and higher levels of student engagement. In addition, the findings of Boyce and Bowers (2018) and Nurabadi et al. (2021) highlight the crucial role of principal instructional leadership in enhancing school performance in Malaysia. Principals who actively set clear educational goals, oversee teaching and learning processes and foster a supportive school environment significantly contribute to their school's success. The study suggests that improving principals' instructional leadership skills could substantially enhance educational outcomes.

Previous studies, such as those by Hallinger (2003) and Hallinger and Murphy (1985), have laid the groundwork by identifying key dimensions of instructional leadership. However, these studies primarily focus on Western contexts. The study aims to fill this gap by examining instructional leadership within Malaysian schools, thereby contributing to the limited empirical research in non-Western settings (Jalampang & Raman, 2020; Wahab et al., 2020). Additionally, while Kilag and Sasan (2023) found discrepancies between principals' self-assessments and teachers' evaluations of leadership effectiveness, this study seeks to explore these dynamics further and propose strategies for alignment.

The literature review reveals several issues, including the challenge of aligning principals' and teachers' perceptions of instructional leadership effectiveness (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). The study addresses this by employing the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to gather expert consensus on effective leadership strategies. Furthermore, while previous studies have underscored the importance of instructional leadership (Bada et al., 2024), there is a need for more localized research to understand its impact within specific cultural contexts. Our study aims to address this by focusing on Malaysian schools and providing tailored strategies for improvement.

3.0 Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), a formal consensus development method that is well-regarded for its structured approach to brainstorming and idea generation (Gallagher et al., 1993). Developed by Delbecq and Van de Ven in 1968, NGT leverages participants' feelings, skills, and experiences to provide qualitative information. This technique was chosen over other consensus methods due to its ability to facilitate active involvement and generate a broad range of ideas in a

structured and time-efficient manner. The NGT session was conducted online via Google Meet, lasting for two hours and involving a panel of seven experts in educational leadership (Shamsuddin, F., & Razak, 2023).

The session followed a rigorous process designed to ensure comprehensive data collection and reliable results (Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1972). Preparation began with experts receiving a briefing document that outlined the session's objectives and topics for discussion. During the session, each expert independently wrote down their ideas related to improving school performance through instructional leadership. This was followed by a round-robin feedback session where experts took turns sharing their ideas, which were recorded without discussion. Subsequently, the group engaged in a discussion to clarify and expand upon the ideas presented. Finally, the experts ranked the ideas based on their importance and feasibility, using NGT-PLUS software to facilitate an anonymous and accurate ranking process (Hugé et al., 2023). The data from the session were analyzed using specific computation methods to identify consensus and generate actionable insights (Hallé et al., 2023).

However, several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the small sample size of seven experts may limit the generalizability of the findings. Despite this, the depth of expertise provided valuable insights specific to the research context. Second, conducting the NGT sessions online presented challenges such as potential connectivity issues and reduced participant engagement compared to in-person sessions. Finally, the reliance on expert opinions introduces potential biases and subjectivity. Efforts were made to mitigate these biases by ensuring diverse representation among experts and employing objective criteria for data analysis (Vahedian-Shahroodi et al., 2023).

In summary, the methodology using the Nominal Group Technique provides a robust framework for gathering and analyzing expert consensus on instructional leadership strategies to improve school performance as described in a well-justified and detailed process above. The limitations are transparently acknowledged, adding to the credibility and reliability of the study.

3.1 Sampling

The study's sample comprised seven experts in educational management, which is considered sufficient for NGT. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) can be implemented with either a single cohort or a large group (Dobbie et al., 2004; Lomax & McLeman, 1984; Mustapha et al., 2022). However, it can also be divided into smaller groups to facilitate effective communication according to the specific needs of the study. According to Horton (1980) a sample size between seven and ten participants is effective for NGT, while Harvey and Holmes (2012) suggest that six to twelve participants ensure diverse yet manageable input for effective communication and analysis. This sample size was chosen to provide specialized insights without requiring a larger group, thereby balancing the depth and diversity of input.

4.0 Findings

The findings of the study are clearly described and systematically presented. Through the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) sessions, the study solicited expert opinions to generate and refine strategies aimed at improving school performance. The findings are summarized in two tables that capture the experts' suggestions and the voting process used to prioritize these suggestions.

Table 1 details the comprehensive strategies proposed by the experts, which include understanding the Malaysian educational context, setting clear goals aligned with national standards, ensuring adequate resources, providing professional development, fostering collaborative learning communities, offering effective instructional leadership, utilizing data-informed decision-making, engaging parents and the community, and establishing continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Each of these strategies is directly relevant to the goal of improving school performance and is grounded in the specific context of Malaysian schools.

Table 1. Expert's suggestions

1	Understanding Malaysian Educational Context: Begin by understanding the Malaysian educational system, including the national curriculum, assessment frameworks, and cultural nuances that may impact teaching and learning
2	Setting Clear Goals aligned with Malaysian Standards: Establish clear academic goals aligned with the Malaysian Education Blueprint or relevant national standards. Ensure these goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound
3	Providing Adequate Resources: Ensure schools have access to sufficient resources, including teaching materials, technology, and funding for professional development, to support effective instruction
4	Supportive Professional Development: Offer ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers, focusing on pedagogical approaches, curriculum implementation, and assessment practices relevant to the Malaysian context
5	Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities: Foster collaborative learning communities among teachers through professional learning communities (PLCs)
6	Effective Instructional Leadership: School leaders should provide instructional leadership by modeling effective teaching practices, providing feedback and support to teachers, and creating a positive school culture conducive to teaching and learning.
7	Data-Informed Decision Making: Utilize data from student assessments, classroom observations, and other sources to inform instructional decisions and identify areas for improvement. Implement systems for data collection, analysis, and use at the school level.
8	Parent and Community Involvement: Engage parents and the community in supporting student learning through regular communication, involvement in school activities, and partnerships with community organizations.
9	Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of school performance, including regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and reviews of instructional practices

Table 2 illustrates the voting process that the experts used to rank the importance and feasibility of each strategy. This process adds a layer of rigor to the findings, ensuring that the strategies are not only expert-endorsed but also systematically validated. The findings highlight the relevance and importance of each strategy, as evidenced by the high percentage of agreement among the experts. The threshold of above 70% for consensus indicates strong support for the proposed strategies, further emphasizing their applicability and

potential impact on improving school performance. The clarity and organization of the findings ensure that they are accessible and actionable, providing a solid foundation for future implementation and research (Deslandes et al., 2010; Dobbie et al., 2004; Mustapha et al., 2022).

Table 2. Voting process for item

Items / Elements	Voter1	Voter2	Voter3	Voter4	Voter5	Voter6	Voter7	Total item score	Percentage	Rank	Priority	Voter Consensus
Understanding Malaysian Educational Context	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	21	100	1		Suitable
Setting Clear Goals aligned with Malaysian Standards	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	20	95.24	2		Suitable
Providing Adequate Resources:	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	20	95.24	2		Suitable
Supportive Professional Development	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	19	90.48	3		Suitable
Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities	2	3	2	3	3	3	3	19	90.48	3		Suitable
Effective Instructional Leadership	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	20	95.24	2		Suitable
Data-Informed Decision Making	2	3	3	3	2	3	3	19	90.48	3		Suitable
Parent and Community Involvement	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	21	100	1		Suitable
Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	21	100	1		Suitable

** Data generated from NGT-PLUS software

In conclusion, the findings clearly illustrate how the nine strategies developed through the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) correspond with established theoretical frameworks and empirical research. For example, the focus on effective instructional leadership as a driver for school improvement aligns with the conclusions of Tan et al. (2024) and Brauckmann et al. (2023) which emphasize the crucial role of leadership in improving educational outcomes. The relevant highlights further underscore their importance and applicability. The use of expert consensus through the NGT process adds validity to the findings, making them a robust contribution to the field of educational leadership and school performance improvement.

5.0 Conclusions

The retrospective evaluation highlights the complexity of managing school performance in Malaysia due to the large number of schools. The study presents nine strategic recommendations developed through expert brainstorming sessions aimed at improving school performance. If effectively implemented, these recommendations could significantly enhance school performance. Key points include understanding the Malaysian educational context, setting clear goals aligned with national standards, providing adequate resources, and fostering professional development. Additionally, promoting collaborative learning communities, effective instructional leadership, data-informed decision-making, parent and community involvement, and continuous monitoring and evaluation reflect a holistic approach to improving school performance.

This study contributes significantly to educational leadership in Malaysia by providing a robust framework for enhancing school performance. By employing the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to gather expert consensus, the recommendations presented are deeply rooted in practical experience and expert knowledge. Furthermore, the proposed recommendations are both practical and actionable, targeting key areas that can positively influence school performance. For instance, emphasizing the provision of adequate resources and professional development opportunities directly supports teachers in refining their instructional practices. Additionally, the focus on effective instructional leadership and data-informed decision-making equips school leaders with the tools to make more informed and strategic decisions.

In conclusion, future research should aim to validate these strategies across different contexts and assess their long-term impact on school performance. Further studies could also investigate the challenges associated with implementing these strategies and the contextual factors that may affect their effectiveness in various school settings.

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