UNVEILING THE COMPLEXITIES OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE MIDDLE YEAR PROGRAMME: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION

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Abstract:

This qualitative exploration delves into the intricate world of instructional leadership within the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Year Programme (MYP) in selected IB international schools in Malaysia. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with Middle Year Programme Coordinators (MYPCs) and teachers, this study seeks to uncover the practices, challenges, and strategies of instructional leadership in this unique educational context. Grounded in theoretical perspectives such as the Path-Goal Theory and the model of instructional leadership, the research framework provides a comprehensive understanding of instructional leadership dynamics within IB schools. By examining the experiences and viewpoints of middle-level school leaders on instructional leadership, this study contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership and informs the development of effective leadership strategies in IB educational settings.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, International Baccalaureate, Middle Year Programme, qualitative research, educational leadership, Malaysia, Path-Goal Theory, IB schools, leadership strategies, qualitative exploration.

Introduction

The landscape of educational leadership has evolved significantly over the years, with various leadership paradigms emerging to meet the diverse needs of educational institutions (Tan et al., 2022; Zuze & Juan, 2020). Among these paradigms, instructional leadership holds particular significance, as it directly impacts teaching and learning processes (Paletta et al., 2020; Sindhvad et al., 2022). However, within the context of International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, instructional leadership takes on a unique dimension, given the distinctive curriculum and pedagogical approaches employed in IB programmes (Cheng & Wu, 2020; Kocak & Ozdemir, 2020). This qualitative research seeks to explore the intricacies of instructional leadership within the IB Middle Year Programme (MYP), focusing on selected IB international schools in Malaysia.

Need for Exploration in the knowledge base of IB Schools

According to a growing body of research, school administrators in the twenty-first century must exhibit instructional leadership competencies (Paletta et al., 2020; Sindhvad et al., 2022; van Schaik et al., 2020). According to these academics, this is because 21st-century schools demand that kids exhibit greater levels of intellectual achievement. It's interesting to note that during the past seven years, international schools have become more and more popular in Malaysia. Therefore, in order to improve these IB schools and raise them to the standards set by the IB organisation, it is worthwhile to conduct in-depth research on the topic of instructional leadership practices at IB schools, which are among the many international schools (Cheng & Wu, 2020; Kocak & Ozdemir, 2020). Consequently, the purpose of this research is to investigate the instructional leadership of IB Coordinators who are responsible for the Middle Year curriculum's implementation at a few Malaysian IB international schools. Anyone interested in the subject topic will find it interesting to read how Middle Year Programme Coordinators at IB worldwide schools are assisting with teaching and learning during the program's implementation. By examining the experiences and viewpoints of middle-level school leaders on instructional leadership, this study will

fill a vacuum in the literature. The results of this study will add significantly to the current discussion regarding the role of instructional leadership in promoting student learning and achievement by shedding light on the opportunities and difficulties experienced by these leaders in middle-level schools.

Middle Leadership in the IB MYP: Balancing Collaboration and Decisiveness

While numerous theories depict instructional leadership as a collaborative endeavor between principals and communities (Hou et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021), the specific context of the MYP demands more from Middle Year Programme Coordinators (MYPCs). They must not only act as collaborators but also be prepared to make decisive calls.Effective MYPCs navigate a dynamic landscape. Collaborating with principals, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders is crucial for identifying challenges and crafting solutions (Hou et al., 2019). This teamwork enables them to tap into diverse perspectives and create a unified path towards shared goals.

However, leadership extends beyond collaboration. As Hansen & Larusdottir (2015) point out, decisive action is often necessary. This might involve tough choices regarding resource allocation or personnel changes, requiring MYPCs to navigate complex situations with clarity and conviction.Furthermore, MYPCs bear the responsibility of designing, implementing, and evaluating instructional programs and materials tailored to student needs. This multifaceted role demands a deep understanding of curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment practices.
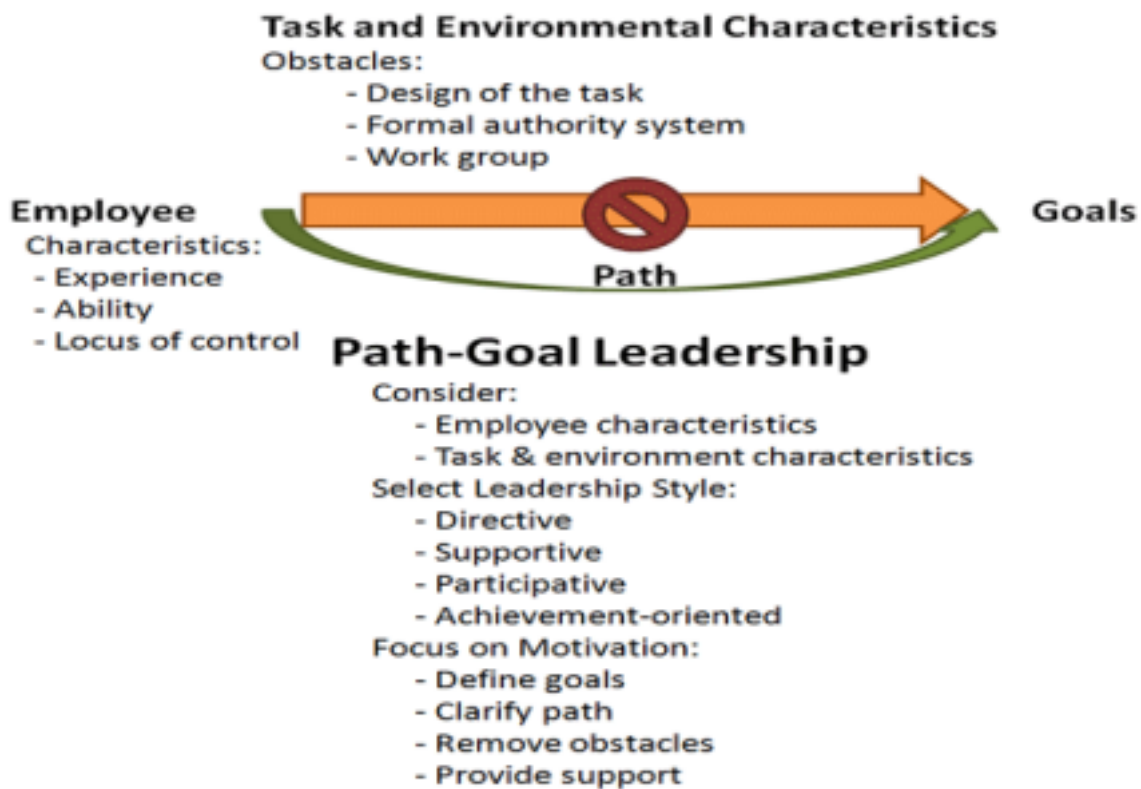
The chosen theoretical framework, House's Path-Goal Theory (1971), acknowledges the critical interaction between leaders and their subordinates. This aspect aligns perfectly with the MYPC's role of motivating and guiding teachers towards achieving shared objectives.

While the theory holds universal applicability across various disciplines (including education), as Figure 1 demonstrates, its emphasis on leader-subordinate dynamics makes it particularly relevant to the MYP context.

In essence, MYPCs operate at a unique intersection of collaboration and decisiveness. Their success hinges on fostering a collaborative environment while possessing the strength to make crucial choices, ultimately ensuring the smooth running and continuous improvement of the MYP program.

Figure 1
Model of Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (House, 1971)

Balancing Collaboration and Decisiveness: Theoretical Underpinnings
Building on the concept of navigating a dynamic landscape, the Path-Goal
Theory (House, 1971) serves as the fundamental framework for this study.
Its emphasis on the interaction between leaders and their subordinates
aligns perfectly with the MYPC's role of guiding and motivating teachers
towards shared objectives. As Figure 1 illustrates, the theory's emphasis on
leader subordinate dynamics makes it particularly relevant to the MYP
context.

However, the Path-Goal Theory alone doesn't fully capture the
complexities of MYPC leadership. Therefore, the model of
instructional leadership developed by Hallinger & Murphy (1985,
1986a) provides additional reference points. The Path-Goal Theory
provides a broader lens to understand the interaction between MYPCs
and teachers, focusing on motivation and goal achievement. The
Hallinger & Murphy model offers a deeper dive into specific leadership
practices, such as curriculum development, professional development,
and assessment.

By combining these frameworks, we gain a comprehensive
understanding of how MYPCs navigate the collaborative and
decisive aspects of their leadership role within the IB MYP
setting.Additionally, it's crucial to remember the role of theoretical
frameworks in research:

They offer an analytical lens to examine complex phenomena like
instructional leadership in their entirety and provide a structure for
organizing research findings and connecting them to existing knowledge.
Further, they serve as powerful tools for researchers and educators to
improve educational practice by informing leadership strategies and

informing future research. Therefore, utilizing these frameworks is not just about applying pre-existing models, but about harnessing their power to gain deeper insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by MYPCs in leading their teams towards educational excellence.

Designing a Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 below shows the Conceptual framework as the result of the synthesis between the Path goal theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986b) model of instructional leadership and the key research questions in this study. While the conceptual framework seems to suggest that the arrow is implying the investigations into relationships between variables, the utilization of this qualitative study will only highlight how the unit of analysis is linked together to produce a contextual understanding of the future intent. Hence, it will be carried out through a qualitative study that does not include hypotheses.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework for the study
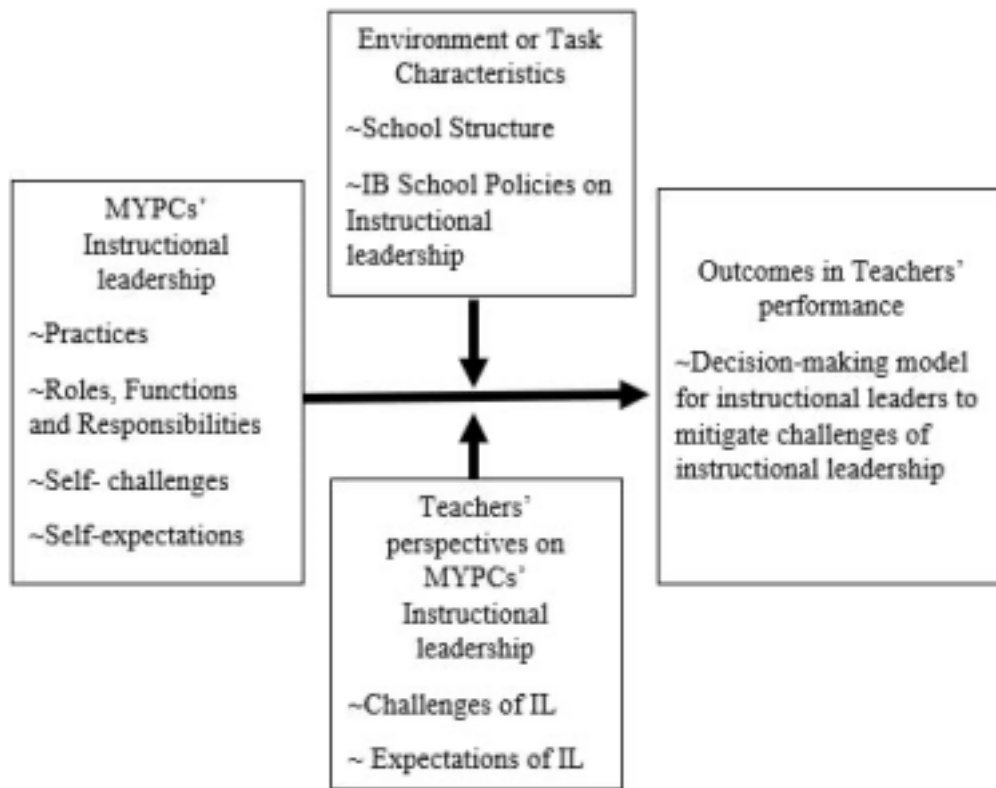
From literature reviews, it is widely known that the concepts of instructional leadership are constantly evolving as educators learn more about strategies to improve teachers' performance (Amzat et al., 2022). In essence, the conceptual framework shows this study would investigate how MYPCs as instructional leaders can take proactive steps to:

(a) understand their practices of Instructional leadership,

(b) describe instructional leadership in the environment of IB schools,

(c) to consider teachers 'perspectives on instructional leadership; and

(d) to effectively promote teachers' performance through the designation of a decision making model.

However, the core principles remain the same for instructional leaders, such as school leaders must set the vision for the school, provide support and resources to teachers, create an environment that promotes collaboration and communication among teachers, and work with teachers to identify best practices and implement them in the classroom (Redecker, 2017). These are considered as the sidelines of findings according to the model of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986b). In addition, there is a need to investigate the challenges of MYPCs as instructional leaders (Shaked & Schechter, 2017). From literature reviews, the challenges associated with instructional leadership can be divided into two main categories: organizational challenges and personal challenges. Organizational challenges include things like resistance to change from stakeholders or lack of resources (Pettigrew et al., 2001). Personal challenges might include feelings of isolation or doubt about one's abilities. For the MYPCs and teachers, overcoming these challenges starts with acknowledging the realities that are present in their IB context (Shaked & Schechter, 2017). For organizational challenges, this might involve building buy-in from key stakeholders or finding creative ways to stretch limited resources. For personal challenges, it might mean seeking out supportive relationships or professional development opportunities (Dickson et al., 2020b). Whatever the challenge, there is no single

solution. It is hoped that once this study has identified the challenges that the people and organization are facing, they can begin to develop strategies for addressing them through better decision-making (Culver et al., 2021).

As a scope of the study, the purpose of this research is to investigate the instructional leadership of IB Coordinators who are responsible for putting into practice the Middle Year Program at a selection of IB international schools located in Malaysia. To be more specific, what are their practices, challenges and strategies of instructional leadership as per the below objectives:

1. To explore the practices of instructional leadership among Middle Year Programme Coordinator from selected IB international schools

2. To explore the challenges of instructional leadership among Middle Year Program Coordinator from selected IB international schools

3. To contextualize a decision-making model for Middle Year Program Coordinators to mitigate challenges and expectations of instructional leadership among selected IB international schools

    As summarized according to Figure 2 above, the proposed conceptual framework for this study provides a guide for understanding, designing, and conducting research. It includes the key areas and

propositions that define and explain MYPCs practices, challenges and strategies of instructional leadership in the context of their IB schools.

Need for Research in IB Schools

The next vital need towards the formation of a research framework is to justify the context of the investigation. As mentioned earlier in the conceptual framework, this study is descriptive and exploratory research which simply seeks to describe or articulate patterns of behaviour (Stefánsdóttir et al., 2022). In practice, the qualitative researcher strives to understand the participants' perspectives and experiences as they interact with their environment. In doing so, the qualitative researcher develops a deep understanding of the issues under study (Merriam, 1998). Hence, a case study approach will be appropriate. Case studies teach students to think critically, use their imagination, and should provide learners with real-life examples of how the real world works (Leek, 2022). Oftentimes, teacher or student groups need to work together towards a common goal, and collaborative teamwork can be developed through instructional materials such as case study videos that show different individuals working together towards a desired outcome (Fagerdal et al., 2022). By reading about how these approaches have been successfully implemented in real-world settings, educators can get a better sense of what might work in their classrooms. This may include conducting interviews with key participants, collecting data from published reports, or observing the program in action. After all of the necessary information has been gathered, the author should then begin drafting the case study. The finished product should provide readers with a clear overview of the program or approach being examined, as well as any lessons that can be

learned from its implementation. In this study, conducting a case study on instructional   leadership can be a very beneficial way to improve our leadership skills. By observing and analyzing the behaviour of successful leaders,scholars can learn what works and what does not work in various situations. Additionally, case studies on instructional leadership can provide insight into the decision-making process of leaders and how they handle different   challenges (Castelblanco Pérez, 2022). Alternatively, a case study may be used at different stages in the research process (Pun, 2022). Depending on which stage they are used they can help reveal gaps within service provision or help in identifying an emerging good practice which could be replicated elsewhere (Feng et al.year?). The use of case studies can also help to identify barriers and facilitators within specific settings.

Need for Research Framework in IB Schools

Selecting Context and Participants for the study

At this juncture, the research framework will be discussed. For this sample of the study, three IB private schools will be selected from three major cities located strategically in Peninsular Malaysia. They are purposely selected from Penang city (located in the northernmost major city   in Malaysia), Kuala Lumpur city (a central part of Klang Valley) and Johor Bahru city (a southern major city) in Malaysia. Each school's 4 teachers will be selected for in-depth focus interviews.

It is proposed that in terms of sampling procedures, purposive sampling will be used in choosing the participants because it allows researchers to study phenomena that are not easily measured using quantitative methods

(Denieffe, 2020). This type of sampling allows researchers to select participants who are more likely to have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Audemard, 2020). In addition, this type of sampling allows researchers to select participants who are most likely to be knowledgeable about the topic being studied. However, there are also some disadvantages to purposive sampling. Firstly, because participants are not chosen at random, there is always the possibility that bias has been introduced into the sample (Jin et al., 2021). Secondly, purposive samples are often small in size, which limits their statistical power. As such, because data collected through purposive sampling is not generalizable to a wider population, this method is only suitable for exploratory research.

Data Collection Process

For data collection, interviews with participants in the study will be carried out. In qualitative research, interviews are known as a common data collection method used in qualitative research (McLellan et al., 2003). Interviews allow researchers to ask questions and probe for a deeper understanding than what might be possible through observation alone. However, interviews can be biased if not conducted properly, and they often require more time and resources than other methods such as focus groups or document analysis (Prior, 2018). In addition, conducting online interviews is an appropriate way to collect in-depth information from individuals about their experiences and opinions, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in the Movement Control Order in Malaysia. Secondly, the researcher intends to conduct focus group interviews to triangulate from teachers' perspectives (Rabiee, 2004). This type of data collection can provide rich insights into people's thoughts and

opinions on a given topic. However, focus groups can be expensive and time-consuming to organize, and they may not produce   representative results if the group dynamics are not carefully managed. As a process, it involves   bringing a group of teachers together to discuss the practices, challenges and better suggestions   for instructional leadership in their schools. This can be a great way to generate ideas and get feedback on specific issues (Orvik et al., 2013). The responses of the participants will only be audio-recorded and not video-recorded due to the school's policy and the participants' consent.   Finally, the audio will be transcribed for further analysis with ATLAS. ti software. Once the researcher has decided on a method of analysis and is familiar with the basic and relevant functions of the software, the researcher will start coding the data according to certain themes or   categories (Denecke & Nejdl, 2009; Schwartz & Ungar, 2015). This is ultimately done by assigning codes to specific passages or segments of text within their dataset. As a methodological   illustration, Figure 3 provides the process flowchart as a reference guide.

Figure 3
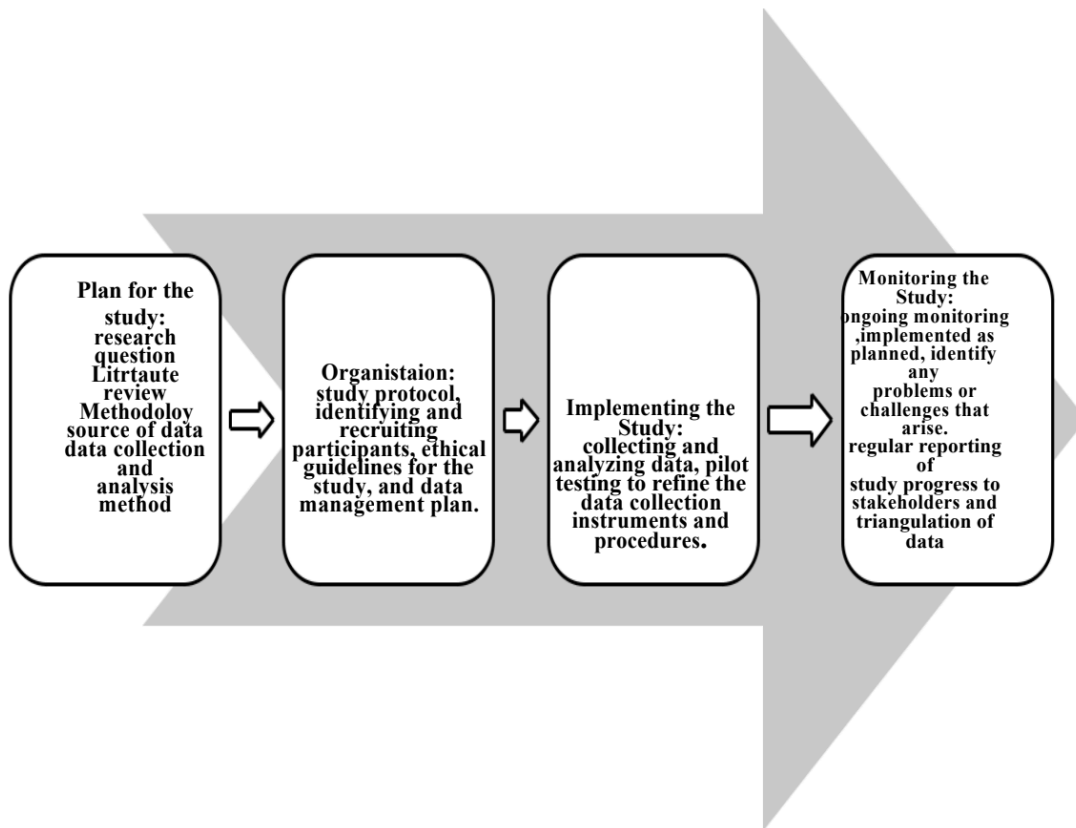
Proposed Research Framework

The research Framework above was modified from the works of Latham,2020 e-book "the Research Canvas".

Plan for Study: This element of the framework includes developing a clear research question, selecting an appropriate case study method, identifying potential sources of data, and determining the data collection and analysis methods that will be used.

Organizing the Study: This element of the framework includes preparing a detailed study protocol, identifying and recruiting participants, establishing ethical guidelines for the study, and developing a data management plan.

Implementing the Study: This element of the framework involves collecting

and analyzing data, using a variety of methods such as interviews, surveys, observations, and document reviews. It may also include the use of pilot testing to refine the data collection instruments and procedures.

Monitoring the Study: This element of the framework includes ongoing monitoring of the study to ensure that it is being implemented as planned, and to identify any problems or challenges that arise. It also includes regular reporting of study progress to stakeholders and conducting quality control checks on the data collected.

This framework provides a structure for conducting a case study, but the specific steps and activities involved in each element may vary depending on the specific case study and the research question being addressed. It is important to be flexible and adaptable throughout the study process to ensure that the research objectives are met.

Conclusion

This research framework is the preliminary approach to conducting a study on the practices, challenges and strategies of instructional leaders s at the IB MYP in a private education group of international IB schools. In this article, the researcher has presented some detail on each step of the technique, beginning with the background with the theoretical and conceptual framework and this is continued with the population and sampling procedure, as well as the process of data collection and analysis method.

As argued, the research framework in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools is an important field of study that has not received enough attention. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the methods used by the instructional leaders at three Peninsular Malaysian private schools that are part of the International Baccalaureate programme.

Purposive sampling, in-depth focus interviews, and focus group interviews will be used to collect information from four instructors at each school. The study's overarching goals are to frame a focused research topic, pick an acceptable case study methodology, locate relevant data sources, and establish procedures for collecting and analysing the data. The team also plans to create an ethical framework for the research, a data management strategy, and a complete study protocol.

It has also rationalized the following methodologies such as interviews, questionnaires, observations, and document reviews. As suggested, this study will also include frequent reporting of study progress to stakeholders and continuing monitoring to ensure the research is being executed as intended. As significance, this research will add to what is already known about instructional leadership in IB schools, especially in Malaysia. In addition, it will provide light on the difficulties instructors confront and the ways in which instructional leadership may be strengthened in IB schools. Looking in the future, this study is a rallying cry for researchers to delve into the importance of a research framework in IB schools and aid in the development of effective instructional leadership strategies.

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