

# Instructional Leadership Practice among Principals of Chinese Primary Schools in Selangor

Teo Yeong Chin, Edward Devadason, Siti Nor Amira Binti Baharudin

Faculty of Education and Humanities, UNITAR International University, Malaysia

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/23400> DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i4/23400

*Published Online:* 13 November 2024

## Abstract

This study examines the instructional leadership practices of principals in high-performing Chinese primary schools in Selangor, Malaysia. Using a qualitative approach, data was gathered through interviews with four principals and a focus group of five teachers. The research explores how principals perceive and practice instructional leadership within the Malaysian context. Findings indicate that principals often struggle to balance instructional leadership with administrative duties imposed by higher authorities. While they acknowledge the importance of instructional leadership in improving teaching and learning, administrative tasks frequently shift their focus. A framework is introduced, represented as a pyramid with five dimensions, starting from managerial responsibilities at the base and culminating with creating a school mission at the top. The study emphasizes the challenge of balancing leadership and management and suggests future research on how principals can navigate these dual roles more effectively to improve school performance.

**Keywords:** Instructional Leadership, School Principals, Leadership Practices, High-Performing Schools, Educational Management, School Climate

## Problem Statement

Over the past three decades, international scholars have emphasized the importance of instructional leadership and developed empirically grounded models of this practice (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985; Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi, 2010; Hallinger and Wang, 2015). Despite substantial evidence supporting its value, the knowledge base on instructional leadership remains limited or still emerging in certain countries (Hallinger and Chen, 2015; Hallinger and Bryant, 2013a, 2013b). Additionally, much of the existing research on leadership practices, particularly in developing countries, is often difficult to access due to language barriers (Harris and Jones, 2015). Malaysia faces this same challenge, resulting in a notable gap in available information on instructional leadership.

Research studies on instructional leadership in Malaysia show significant variation in quality, definitions, methodologies, and findings. However, by carefully analyzing the available empirical evidence, key insights into principals' instructional practices have emerged. Organized using Hallinger's (2005), framework for reviewing instructional leadership, the local

evidence, gathered from both English and Bahasa Malaysia sources, highlights two central themes: (a) the personal factors influencing instructional leadership and (b) the effects of instructional leadership on organizational and school outcomes.

Malaysians are well acquainted with the nation's desire to become a fully developed country by the year 2020 (Perera, Adams, & Muniandy, 2015). To realise this aspiration, Malaysia must have in place a globally competitive education system capable of producing globally competent and competitive talents. However, the nation's drive towards a fully developed country sits at odds with its poor standings in international student assessments like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

The results of the PISA 2022 showed that in Malaysia, almost no students achieved a Level 5 or higher in reading, compared to the OECD average of 7%. Students at this level can understand complex texts, grasp abstract or counterintuitive concepts, and distinguish between fact and opinion by relying on implicit cues related to the content or source of the information. (OECD, 2022).

In Malaysia, research indicates that school leaders play a crucial role in enhancing school outcomes and fostering positive learning environments (Perera et al., 2015; Ghani et al., 2011; Jainabee & Jamelaa, 2011). However, recent policy changes have increased principals' accountability for achieving school effectiveness and driving school improvement (Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2014). The National Education Blueprint emphasizes that principals now have the autonomy to shape their schools' learning environments (Ministry of Education, 2012). School leaders are also expected to guide teaching and learning, build professional learning communities, and sustain school excellence by continuously improving examination results.

Undeniably, Malaysian principals face increasing challenges, as they are burdened with extensive management duties, such as administrative tasks and meetings, which divert their focus from improving classroom teaching and learning (Tie, 2012; Jones et al., 2015). Additionally, principals are expected to involve all stakeholders in shaping the school's goals, mission, and values (Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2014). This makes the role of principals more demanding in the nation's effort to create high-performing schools (Anthony, Said, Mohamad, & Mokhtar, 2015). To support this transformation, the Malaysian Ministry of Education aims to equip every public school with high-performing leaders capable of improving student outcomes and driving innovation by 2020 (IAB, 2010; MOE, 2012). Special emphasis is placed on developing school leaders' instructional leadership skills, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, to enhance student learning outcomes.

### **Research Objective**

In view of the inadequate contribution to the knowledge base on instructional leadership in Malaysia, and the limited evidence base, this research will study the following specific and measurable research objectives:

1. To explore how primary school principals view their role as instructional leaders.
2. To examine primary school principals' understanding and practice of instructional leadership in high performing Chinese Primary School.

### Significance of Study

This study is aiming to contribute to the knowledge base about educational leadership in this region through in depth, comparative, empirical investigation in a Malaysian context. As mentioned earlier, the literature on instructional leadership, particularly in the Malaysian context is limited. Since the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 emphasizes instructional leadership and aspires to school improvement, this research will provide information from the data collection to contribute to the knowledge base in instructional leadership in Malaysia.

For the purposes of this study instructional leadership is understood as an approach to leadership that propagates active participation (direct/indirect) on the part of the principal, to educate all learners to a high level of academic achievement. It includes the following general dimensions of a principal's behavior which has a few functions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Dimension 1	:	Defining the school's mission which includes framing and communicating the school's goals
Dimension 2	:	Managing the instructional programme, which includes coordinating the curriculum, supervising and evaluating instruction and monitoring learner progress.
Dimension 3	:	Promoting school climate by protecting instructional time, providing incentives for learning, promoting professional development and maintaining high visibility.

A high-performing school represents the pinnacle of educational excellence, where academic achievement, effective teaching, and a nurturing environment converge to create an ideal setting for student success. These schools are characterized by their ability to consistently produce outstanding outcomes for their students, preparing them not only for higher education but also for the challenges of life beyond the classroom. The foundation of a high-performing school rests on several key pillars, including academic achievement, effective teaching, student support, engaged leadership, and a positive school culture.

In Malaysia, High-Performance School or in Malay, *Sekolah Berprestasi Tinggi*, commonly referred to as HPS, is a distinguished title awarded to select schools recognized for their strong ethos, character, and unique identity that enable them to excel in all areas of education. These schools are known for their long-standing culture of excellence and their significant contributions to national human capital, continuing to grow holistically while remaining competitive on the international stage. The title is bestowed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) as part of the National Key Result Areas under the Government Transformation Programme (GTP).

This study is motivated by a pressing need to address the challenges faced by Malaysian High Performing School leaders in balancing instructional leadership with administrative demands. By examining instructional practices within Malaysia's unique educational context, this study not only provides insights that could drive local school improvement but also contributes to the global dialogue on effective school leadership in developing countries. Findings from this

study can inform policymakers, guiding efforts to reduce administrative burdens on principals, enhance their institutional focus and ultimately improve student outcomes across Malaysia.

### **Literature Review**

Instructional leadership emerged as a practice-based concept in the mid-20th century in the USA. Early research on instructional management, conducted at the Far West Lab for Research and Development in San Francisco (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Bridges, 1982), laid the groundwork for developing the idea of principals' instructional leadership based on robust empirical evidence (Dwyer, 1986; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Heck, Larson, & Marcoulides, 1990). Hallinger and Murphy (1985) later developed a complementary model. Over time, scholars have made significant strides in clarifying and refining the conceptualizations of this role.

Today, there is considerable agreement on the broad nature of the role of instructional leadership as well as its impact on key school conditions and student learning (Leithwood et al. 2006; Louis et al. 2010; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Instructional leaders were described as strong, directive leaders who had been successful at “turning their schools around” (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Bossert et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986). Consequently, there was an increasing interest from policymakers, practitioners and scholars around the world in both the dimensions that comprise this construct as well as in ways of strengthening its application in practice.

Recently, a substantial research programme has started to explore instructional leadership within Asia, in seven East Asian countries, i.e Vietnam, Mainland China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia and Thailand (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). Another comparative piece of work is also focusing on leadership preparation and development in a number of Asian countries including Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Indonesia (Harris and Jones, 2015). Each of these studies are aiming to contribute to the knowledge base about educational leadership in this region through in depth, comparative, empirical investigation. Both studies aim to engage with and review, as far as possible, the ‘indigenous literature’ (Bajunid, 2005) on school leadership particularly in countries where the evidence is barely visible within the international literature. In the next section, the contemporary researches done on Instructional leadership will be reviewed.

Özdemir et al (2020), stated that there is significant medium-level relationship between principals' instructional behaviors and teachers' self-efficacy. Additionally, the instructional leadership demonstrated by principals positively impacts teachers' motivation and task focus, enhances learners' learning abilities, and improves teachers' self-evaluation skills regarding themselves and their students.

Instructional leadership has positively influenced the learning organization within school ((Lim & Singh, 2020). In the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025, the government explicitly outlined its aspiration in the fifth shift to ensure that high-performance leadership is implemented in every school to improve overall effectiveness. The dimensions of instructional leadership and learning organization examined in this study could serve as valuable references for educators and the Ministry in their efforts to enhance school effectiveness.

It is statistically stated that there are differences between male and female teachers' perceptions of their principals' instructional leadership practices. Fred and Singh (2021) stated that principals' instructional leadership practices were rated at a "medium high" level in under-enrolled rural schools. However, the challenges and issues these schools face make it more difficult for them to enhance their academic quality.

Sharma (2018), focused on instructional leadership of principals of successful schools in four Asian countries India, Malaysia, Thailand and United Arab Emirates. About fifty-five principals from these countries participated in this qualitative method involving questionnaire and interview study. In contrary to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), Model which advocates on classroom observations all the principals from these Asian countries have put emphasis on (i) Committing leadership for student's overall development (ii) Incorporating teachers and students in leadership process (iii) Including clinical, developmental and collegial models of supervision for developments (iv) Continuous professional development of all.

Sharma, Yusoff, Kannan & Baba (2011), further discussed on the nature of instructional supervision carried out in schools in three Asian countries, i.e. India, Malaysia and Thailand among hundred teachers and twenty five principals and other heads from three countries. It was observed from the finding that instructional supervision in these three Asian countries were not conducted effectively. The role of instructional supervision as envisaged throughout the findings in this study simply seems to display the completion of paper work and fault finding process. The teachers in this study argued that supervisors do not consider instructional supervision as a platform to develop a sense of ownership for teachers and their professional growth and they are not at all benefited by the process. Instead it is done to punish, demoralize and insult teachers rather than to improve their performances.

In a literature review on the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teacher readiness to implement change, Aziz, Fooi, Asimiran & Hassan (2015), concluded that, a principal must be wise and effective as an instructional leader to create a conducive working environment and increase teacher readiness toward change, so that every change may be successfully implemented. Further studies need to be done to enhance the findings from the literature. Minimal number of reference from Malaysian findings is used. Therefore it does not give a holistic view of the principal instructional leadership practices and teacher readiness towards change in relation to education reform.

Ail, Taib, Jaafar, Mohamed & Omar (2015), in a quantitative survey conducted to examine the instructional leadership of principals and the teachers' commitment in three Mara Junior Science Colleges (MJSC) in Pahang found a high relationship between instructional leadership and the level of teachers' commitment. Yasin, Pihie, Fooi, Basri, & Baki (2016), in a qualitative research done, indicated that the principals understood instructional leadership as giving clear vision and goal, be a role model, classroom supervision, supporting and listening. They did not elaborate about school climate. However their goal and vision is not toward globalization but still focused on exam-oriented system. They have strong believes that to be instructional leadership is to portrays 'role model' toward the teachers, staff and the whole organization. The quality of teaching in a school can be affected only marginally by a principal's involvement in the classroom.

Educational leadership researchers define instructional leadership in a variety of ways. Alig-Mielcarek (2003), defines it in terms of principal behavior that leads a school to educate all learners to a level of high achievement. These include behavior which defines and communicates shared goals, monitors and provides feedback on the teaching and learning process and promotes school wide professional development.

#### *Instructional Leadership Model, Hallinger & Murphy' (1985)*

This model which is also known as PIMRS model of instructional leadership (Hallinger and Wang (2015), is the most fully tested approach to instructional leadership of Hallinger and his colleagues (Hopkins, 1998). As an initial exertion, Hallinger and Murphy examined the instructional leadership behaviors of 10 elementary school principals and conducted a review of the school effectiveness literature. They used a common questionnaire to collect information on instructional leadership principals, school's staff and central administration supervisors.

Later, this data was supplemented with a document analysis. Using this, a framework of instructional management with three dimensions was developed which they further delineated into 11 specific instructional leadership functions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). There is considerable empirical support for this model, particularly as it relates to student's outcome (Hopkins, 1998). Hallinger and Murphy (1985), used the 11 job descriptors from the three dimensions of instructional management to create an appraisal instrument of principal instructional management behavior, the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). It was later revised and the 11 job descriptors were reduced to 10.

Although researchers and scholars may differ as to the exact nature of the instructional leadership, most researchers still uses stem from Hallinger and Murphy's model (1985), as their basis. This model has therefore been chosen to serve as a framework for the present study. Enlisted a review of the 10 dimensions of instructional leadership described in the model. His dimensions will be employed in the analyzing of research data for this research.

#### **Promoting a Positive School Climate**

This dimension is broader in scope and intent than the second dimension and overlaps with dimensions incorporated into transformational leadership frameworks (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2006). It conforms to the notion that successful schools create an academic press through the development of high standards and expectations. It also creates a culture that fosters and rewards continuous learning and improvement.

Gupton (2003), stated that, school climate may be one of the most important ingredients of a successful instructional programme. The school climate can be also seen as the school's personality. Without a climate that creates a harmonious and well-functioning school, a high degree of academic achievement is difficult. The word "climate" and "culture" are often used interchangeably. Notably, the climate of the school is closely associated with the school culture. The longer the school is established, the more the culture could be portrayed and described distinctively. Principals' effect on learning is mediated through the climate and culture of the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Additionally, if school culture can affect learning and ultimately students' achievement (Watson, 2001; Gupton, 2003), then the school principals are responsible for creating a conducive school climate for effective teaching and

learning (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Therefore, it is an essential and fundamental part of instructional leadership.

*Murphy’s Comprehensive Instructional Leadership Framework (1990)*

In a comprehensive review of the literature on instructional leadership, Murphy (1990) noted that principals in effective schools (schools where the quality of teaching and learning were strong) demonstrated instructional leadership both directly and indirectly. Using this review, he provided a systematic and comprehensive review of instructional leadership. The framework consists of four dimensions of instructional leadership broken down into sixteen different roles or behaviors that makes up that dimension. Namely, (a) developing the school mission and goals; (b) co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating curriculum, instruction and assessment; (c) promoting a climate for learning; and (d) creating a supportive working environment (Murphy, 1990).

Remaining the other dimensions in Hallinger & Murphy Model (1985), this model has an addition of one sub dimension in the promoting school climate which is, establishing positive expectation & standard. On the other hand, under the fourth dimensions, creating a supportive working environment Murphy (1990) has describe six job descriptions of an instructional leader. Namely, (i) creating a safe and orderly learning environment; (ii) providing opportunities for meaningful student involvement; (iii) developing staff collaboration; (iv) securing outside resources to achieve school goals; (v) forging link between home and the school; and (vi) developing supportive work environment. All this job descriptions are related to the teaching and learning process. In this study the constructs found in this model will be used as well for coding purpose to see if this construct has significant relevance among the instructional leader’s in Malaysia.

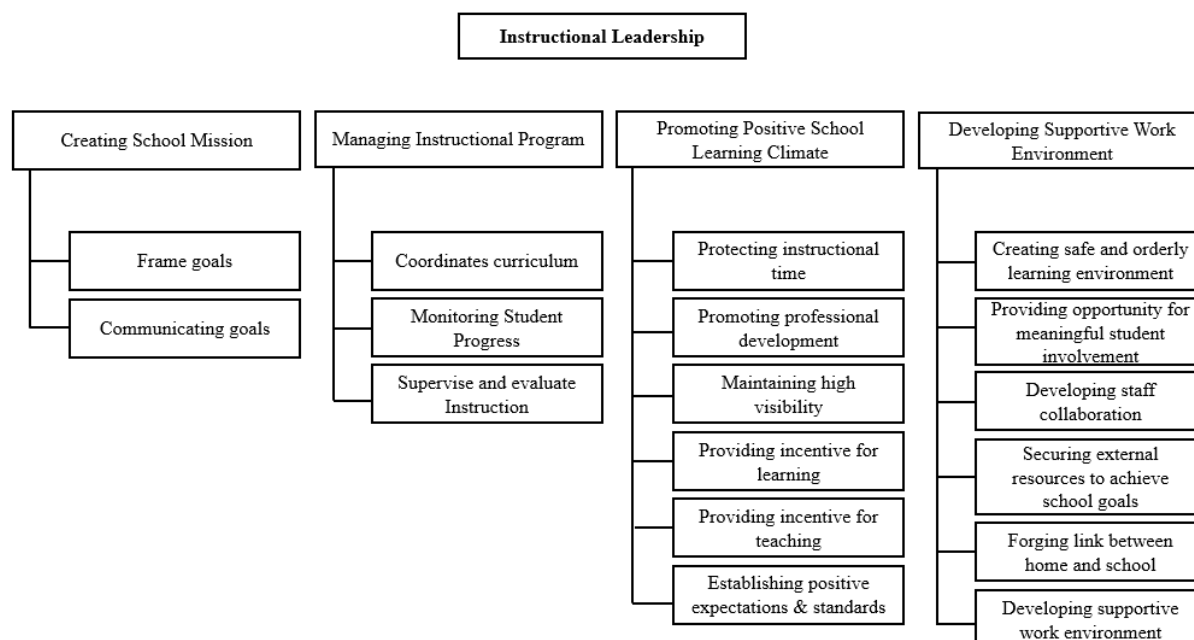


Figure 2.1 Murphy’s Comprehensive Instructional Leadership Framework (1990)

**Research Methodology**

The aim of this research is to investigate instructional leadership practices among school head teachers in Malaysia. This research is a case study of instructional leadership practice among Malaysian principals. The important indicators of a qualitative case study will be discussed with references to scholars such as Creswell (2013), Hayes (2006), Merriam (2002), Stake and Savolainen(1995), and Yin (1994). In the next section the researcher will present and discuss the overall research design employed in this research.

In the context of this research in order to understand the complex social phenomena, a qualitative approach was employed. It was decided that the best method to determine the principals' understanding of their roles as instructional leaders would be by interviewing them, which requires a qualitative approach. To determine the principals' understandings of their core duties and to find out what challenges they face in balancing their dual roles of manager and instructional leader requires the researcher's active involvement with the principals. It is a complex aspect that require a decent understanding of the subject and good interpretation skill to gather information as perceived by the principals in their schools.

In this case study, the researcher will be employing the method of observation with minimal inference, reflective interviewing and event sampling, an understanding of how principal leadership is enacted and contextualized within the school can be identified. Yin (1994), and Tellis (1997), also cautioned that not all data sources are essentially important in a case study. However, multiple data sources are needed to mitigate bias and that the reliability of the study is kept inviolate.

Merriam (2002), mentioned that the primary instrument for a research data collection and data analysis is the researcher, since they are able to respond, adapt and have the ability to expand and understand adhoc the verbal and non-verbal communication. This is an advantage. On the other hand, immediate process of information or data, clarification, summarizing material, checking with the respondents for accuracy of interpretation and exploration of unusual or unanticipated responses seem to be an added advantages in a case study method. Merriam (2002), also cautioned that human instrument has its own limitations and biases which may affect the study. Though these biases or subjectivities cannot be all together obviated, cautiously identifying them and monitoring them is essential to see they do not affect the shaping and interpretation of the data.

Since in case study no hard numbers are used to manipulate, no scientific experiments are set up and it is people centered in a contextual setting, it cannot be viewed as a soft option of research (Tsang and Kwan, 1999). Majority of educational researchers have accepted the case study method as a prime strategy for developing educational theory which crystallize education policies and education practices (Creswell, 2013; Bassey, 1999).

Qualitative researchers may use a variety of combinations of data collection methods or strategies to study participants' perspectives namely: observation, interviews, artefacts, documents and other supplementary techniques (Creswell, 2013; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The research strategies are flexible and many different combinations of strategies may be used to obtain valid data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Mertens (1998), asserts that researchers using the interpretivist paradigm most often use qualitative methods such as



interviews, observations and document reviews. These three main data collection method will be used for the purpose of this study. Semi structured interviews was selected as main method.

### *Interview*

Henning et al (2004), very concisely describes interview as communicative events aimed towards finding what the participants thinks, knows and feels about the subject of the research. This would imply interviews are conducted with the specific aim to find out what participants think, feel, do and what they have to say about the topic or issue on hand. Henning et al. (2004) appropriately summarize it as the participants giving the interviewer their subjective reality in a formatted discussion. In addition to this, interviews also enable the researcher to check and to verify and at times refute information gathered from other research methods such as observations, document analysis and literature reviews.

In this research, semi-structured interviews with a short interview protocol will be used. These interview protocol questions which was pilot tested derived from the larger project which was focused on the topic of instructional leadership in East Asia. Here for this research some part of the schedule were phrased in a user friendly manner to allowing respondents being in their common environment and respond in ordinary language eloquent for them which is also understandable to the interviewer.

To facilitate this predicament, the interview schedule was also translated into the local language (Bahasa Malaysia) and was verified by a group of native language speakers as being an accurate translation from English version. The interviews in this research involves an open ended and semi structured questions which will give the principals opportunity to express their view of their role and that of the others in enacting instructional leadership. At all time, the interviewees will be assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviews (Denzin, 1978; Glazer & Strauss, 1965). The main aims and objectives of the research as stated in chapter one will serve as the prime guide of the structure of the interviews. Reassurance will be given to the participants on the aim of the research is to determine their perceptions in respect of Instructional Leadership and not to judge or evaluate their management skills or so forth.

Semi-structured interviews can be disadvantageous in that the interviewer's presence may bias responses (Creswell, 2006). The participants at times may respond selectively on what they think the interviewer wants from them or sensitive questions are asked. There is a lack of anonymity because the participant can see the interviewer and this can to a certain extent influence the participant's responses. In order to avoid this, a researcher should examine and carefully scrutinize her/his own familiarity with the topic and its source for a possible bias (Creswell, 2008). As much as possible, the researcher will interpret data and making conclusions from a researcher's stance. The aim was, as much as possible, to benefit from inside knowledge and to minimize the biasedness.

In relation to the principal's current position and leadership styles, their personal and prior professional experiences will be explored. In order to generate a preliminary propositions concerning their Instructional Leadership practice enacted in these specific organization and socio cultural context.

### **Observation**

Observations are yet another form of qualitative data gathering that can provide unexpected and useful information witnessed at the research sites. For such purposes, field notes will be jotted down to capture as many aspects of a scenario, such as non-verbal gestures and expressions that could add value to the qualitative evidence.

Since this study will be conducted in school premises, permission will be obtained from the school principals for the researcher to attend and bear witness to multiple observational settings. This will enable the researcher to get a holistic knowledge of what is happening in the school under the leadership of the principal. It will also give the observer a firsthand experience and firsthand knowledge and expertise in interpreting what is observed (Merriam, 2002).

The researcher ensured the principals will be observed in a non-obstructive manner as they interact with teachers, staffs, parents and students. The principals will be observed for a period of five working days in order to develop an in-depth picture of their instructional leadership practice. An average of three to five hours of observation will involve in each shadowing day. A descriptive field note will be kept of their daily activities

### **Sample Population and Size**

A sample population is referred to the group of individual participants in the research. Samples are selected population from a larger group in a particular environment. In this research an opportunistic sample of 4 principals from a wider population of principals in one district will be selected. It is an important feature of qualitative research to have a flexible sampling design particularly when researches done are in exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2013)

In this research, the researcher identified the importance of comparing principals within the same jurisdiction, a particular district. Selection of the 4 schools was guided by issues of access and issues of availability. Primary school headteachers from Chinese Primary Schools (SJKC) will be selected because in the Instructional Leadership literature, researchers suggest that the effects of principal instructional leadership are more substantial at this level of schooling (e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Louis et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2006; Robinson et al., 2008).

It is a commonly asked question concerns the sufficiency of the numbers of respondents and interviews when a research project is designed. Baker & Edwards (2012) clearly answered this vital question. It largely depends on the epistemological, methodological and practical issues when conducting a research. It is also depends on the resources. However, in response to the question, Baker & Edwards (2012) also mentioned that, in a qualitative study, one respondent who is the person of interest is all needed. Looking at the resources and time limitation, in this study a range of 5 interviews of primary school head teachers, observation of five prominent principals, focus group interview with teachers to triangulate the findings is engaged in this research is feasible.

### **Data Analysis**

Notes were taken while digitally record the interviews. Then, the interviews will be transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the interview had taken place to support the interpretation and findings (Sandelowski, 1993). Those interviews conducted in Chinese and

Malay will be translated into English. Each interview will be fully transcribed and uploaded into a common drive. Close examinations will be done to data searching for themes and patterns that gives a clearer picture of the subject and the aim of the study. Here the similarities and differences and meaning particular perceptions focusing on the aim of the study will be uncovered (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 1998).

All the transcripts will be carefully read and re-read through to get a sense of the whole. One participant's responses will be randomly selected to find underlying meanings and thoughts of that interview. The same procedure will be followed for each interview transcript. Similar topics will then be clustered together and arranged into themes and sub-themes. Themes will be reduced by grouping related topics that showed inter-relationships. As emphasised by Henning et al (2004), analyses will be a true reflection of the participant's views and perceptions.

As mentioned earlier, every participants will be identified with pseudonyms in the report upon transcribing and coding the digitally recorded interviews. For a smooth knowledge organization and presentation, Atlas.ti9 research software will be used for the process of analysis. Data will consist of chronological, narrative records including transcribed interviews, observation field notes, documents, and interpretive asides recorded by researchers in each setting (Miles & Huberman, 1994). With this, the researcher will be able to exploit the quality of the qualitative data and better judge its objectivity.

### **Validity, Reliability and Triangulation**

Validity questions whether the researcher, by using certain methods, is investigating what the researcher say he/she is investigating (Henning et al., 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), the claims of validity is highly residual on the data collection and analysis techniques employed in the research. To ensure the researcher accurately recorded the phenomena under investigation and for the issue of credibility, the researcher will use triangulation, member check and peer debriefing to promote confidence.

To ensure trustworthiness of the findings and for establishing validity and reliability of research finding, qualitative researcher aims to design and incorporate methodological strategies unlike quantitative researcher who apply statistical methods. This is a process accounting for personal biases which may have influenced findings. In order that the overall findings are conscientious, this will be done.

Triangulation is not a technological solution for data collection or analytic problems. However, it allows researchers to validate, confirm, corroborate findings within a single study (Teddlie & Yu 2007). Triangulation leads various data sources and methods to a singular proposition on the phenomenon being studied (Mathison, 1998). This technique to provide concrete evidences from data is essential in research as the researcher form hence can construct meaningful propositions about the area being studied. In this study, data sources, theories and organizational documents and evidences will be used as a way of approaching triangulation. Triangulation with respondents will be carried out and verification of researcher's interpretation will be done when writing is completed. Triangulation is important in this case study as this research is integrated with various respondent and comes from

different data sets such as interviews, observations, documentary analysis. The issue of validity, reliability in this research will be ensured through triangulation.

### Findings and Results

The following observations and information were gathered from the interviews and documents of the schools sampled. Table 4.1 provides a summarized profile of the schools. Thereafter, a brief overview of each principal & focus group will be given. The school sizes are defined as “small” for schools with 200 students and below; “Medium” size for schools with number of 201-999 students; and “large” for schools with 1000 and above students studying in the particular school. The predominant parents economic status of the parents of students was defined by the principals during the interview session.

Table 4.1

#### *Profile of the School & Principals*

Resp. No.	Gender	Race	School Type	Average School Size	School Socio Setting	Predominant Parents Economic Status	Principal Year of Service
#1	Female	Chinese	SJKC	2800 (Large)	Urban	High & Middle	7
#1	Male	Chinese	SJKC	3877 (Large)	Semi Urban	Middle & Lower	18
#3	Male	Chinese	SJKC	1300 (Large)	Urban	High & Middle	16
#4	Female	Chinese	SJKC	900 (Medium)	Urban	High & Middle	1

### Principals

#### *Principal #1*

Principal #1 had an experience of leading two schools simultaneously when she was promoted first as a principal since the number of students in both the school was small. The main school had 45 pupils and the branch school had 35 pupils. Being principal for the past 7 years, currently she serves in the fourth school for the past 3 years. She has not attended any formal training prior to the appointment as principal. However, she has attended an intense one-week course on leadership when appointed as principal. Her experience as a senior assistant has been an additive for the current position. This is a large school situated in an urban setting and the parents are from high and middle income groups. However, this is not a high-performing school.

#### *Principal #2*

With 18 years of experience from various school dilemmas, Principal #2 has set foot in this vernacular school for the past 7 years. This energetic and vibrant principal has received *Anugerah Perkhidmatan Cemerlang* (Excellent Service Award) thrice during his tenure as principal. He has not been through any formal training before appointed as principal. However, he followed through short courses done by IAB especially on the area of administration. Currently he is leading a large vernacular school with 3877 students situated

in a semi urban new village setting. The students in this school comes mainly from middle and lower income family.

#### *Principal #3*

Without prior formal training on principal leadership Principal #3 has been in the office for the past 16 years. He has been in this school for the past 6 years. During his leadership this school has experienced a turnaround in academic achievement and it is now classified as Band 1 and known to be high performing being the top 10 in the district. This large school comes with a population of 1300 students situated in an urban setting. Most of the student comes from middle and high income family background.

#### *Principal #4*

This highly motivated young principal has been in the office for the past 4 years. Before Principal#4 became the principal, she has been a senior assistant for two years. She has been newly appointed to this newly established vernacular school. Before being appointed as principal, she has been through the NPQEL training. This medium sized school is located in an urban setting. The student comes mostly from middle and high income family.

Research Question One - What is the level of understanding of the concept of instructional leadership among the Chinese Primary School principal?

In relations to the level of understanding of the concept of Instructional Leadership among principals, analysis from the data collected showed the participated principals has understood and practices Instructional Leadership in a very unique ways and used different strategies to keep the teaching and learning process intact in their respective schools. The results only derived from 4 principals and therefore cannot be generalised to the population of Malaysian principals. However, the results are clear and constructive for understanding. Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. The first level of finding derived from deductive reasoning from the PIMRS Instructional Leadership Model (1985).

### **Creating School Mission**

The principals functions and role in framing school goals and communicating the school goals is ascertain under this dimension of the model. They are to ensure that the school goal is clear and measurable and are specially focused on the academic progress of the student. It is the responsibility of the principals also to ensure these goals are widely known and supported by the school community.

#### *a) Framing School Goals*

As a whole, 3 out of 4 principals have mentioned about them involved in framing the school goals. Since in Malaysia a centralized governing system is practiced, every school despite their geographical location and school size follows the same vision an goal. However, some principals emphasized their goals. Usually, it has a tie with the expectation and goal of the higher authority. These are what they have said when talking about creating school goals.

*Following the Government's principle that every child has to go to school ....That is the first thing, Education for All". "Second thing is that... Helping everyone... helping students to learn". (Respondent #3).*

*I want to help students to achieve UPSR. I want to help all students in my school can read and write in 3 languages , which is in Bahasa Cina, Bahasa Malaysia and English (Respondent #1).*

*I have a big responsibility, my aim is for all the students to score well (in public examination) (Respondent #1).*

However, both the two specifications described under this dimension are very lowly indicated by the principals. This may be because in Malaysia we have a centralized education system where a general vision and mission for all government school and government aided schools derive from the Ministry of Education Malaysia. Often from the response it was visible that the principals seem to follow the directive from the Ministry of Education and enforce accordingly the requirements stipulated from the higher authority. The quality of the school is measured by its student achievement. This is the primary goal of the principals as reflected by few principals below: .

#### *b) Communicating School Goals*

It is also identical to note that only 2 principals talked about communicating school goals in the school. The following thoughts were shared by the respondents when discussed about communicating school goals.

*Teachers are sent by the Ministry, we cannot select. When teachers report to school, I will talk to them regarding our mission and vision and what is their role (Respondent #1).*

*We must share our vision with parents and teachers. They must know where we are heading and I need to enlist them (Respondent #1).*

The Education Blueprint 2013-2025 highlights the goal and purpose of the Malaysian education system, to equip students holistically to allow them to succeed in the 21st century, with all of the opportunities and challenges that this new era presents. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) is committed to delivering on these goals. To this MOE seeks to develop young Malaysians who are knowledgeable, think critically and creatively, have leadership skills and are able to communicate with the rest of the world (Blueprint, 2012, pg8). Besides that, students are also molded to be imbued with values, ethics and a sense of nationhood, enabling them to make the right choices for themselves, their families and the country with a view towards enduring and overcoming life's inevitable challenges.

#### *Managing Instructional Programs*

The second dimension of this model focuses on the leadership's function in coordinating and controlling of instruction and curriculum in the school. There are three main functions of the principals included in this dimension of the model. It requires the principal's deep engagement in the school's instructional development. It assumes that the development of academic cores is key leadership responsibility.

#### *c) Supervising and Evaluating Instruction*

All principals have mentioned that they supervise and evaluate instruction. Often this comes as a requirement from the higher authority. Monitoring is also done to improve teaching and

learning process. The principals' feels highly responsible to carry out their duty to supervising and evaluating instructions. At some schools the principals carry out the task of supervision and evaluation together with their assistance. The following were mentioned.

*I find out more about teaching and learning through a learning walk. Teachers are busy. So I walk in and stand at the back. I do a learning walk every day but do not enter.... We also have learning walks in each classroom and across the school and this helps me keep in touch with what is going on in lessons. I observe some classes everyday. In terms of student learning – again I visit classrooms and I analyse the strengths and weaknesses of teachers –then I give them feedback so they can improve (Respondent #1).*

*I do inspections in every class. Every month every teacher is inspected and I sit and talk to the teachers about what they need to do to improve (Respondent #2).*

*In the classroom of course we monitor, not just by walking. Every now and then we have to go into their classes and evaluate their teaching (Respondent #3).*

*We have to go around to the class, every morning, we have to go around the school, at least once just walking, walking management, by walking around the school, to make sure the teachers go according to their time table, go into their class on time (Respondent #4).*

Although different purposes for evaluating teaching personnel may exist, the focus of the instructional leader in performance evaluation would be on promoting growth and development in respect of teachers which, would improve learner achievement (Gupton, 2003; Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu & Van Rooyen, 2009).

It is essential as Glanz (2006) mentioned, a principal can contribute to meaningful supervision and professional development by engaging (i) in word and deed, place emphasis on improving teaching and promoting learning; (ii) involve teachers in planning, implementing and assessing supervision and professional development; (iii) utilize experts in supervision and professional development as consultants; (iv) provide options or alternatives to traditional practices of supervision and professional development; (v) draw links between supervision and professional development and student achievement.

#### *d) Coordinating Curriculum*

Coordinating curriculum is not seen major task of the principals as the assistants are given the responsibility to coordinate curriculum. However, 50% of the principals mentioned that they create opportunities for learning by coordinating extra hour of learning in school.

*My strategy has been to put on extra classes for you for years and years 6 in all subjects. These classes take place after school 1 hour (Respondent #2).*

*Especially this year I myself said we need to start the tuition classes in the afternoon for standard 4, 5, 6 students. As for me, there is continuous improvement for students from standard 4 to 6 to do to prepare for the exam. Actually I said well prepared is from standard 4 (Respondent #4).*

This is an expected outcome in Malaysia as the MOE coordinates the general curriculum of the schools. A generic syllabus and system are given to the schools according to the types of school, such as KSSR for the National Schools (SK) and Primary School Integrated Curriculum (KBSR - Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah) for the National Type Schools (SJKT & SJKC). It is also stipulated under Section 18 of the Education Act 1996 that the national curriculum will be used by all schools under the national education system. It is also mentioned that the Minister shall prescribe a national curriculum specifying the knowledge, skills and values expected to be acquired by the pupil at the end of the period of schooling and include the core subjects and other subjects (Education Act 1996). However, principals did mention extra efforts were made to create extra hour of learning in the schools to enhance student learning and to achieve better student achievements

#### *e) Monitoring Student Progress*

Two principals talked about this dimension. At most instances the teachers were expected to monitor student progress and manage them accordingly.

*Once a while I go around to the classes and check students' work. We have one Operation called "Operasi Menggilap Mutiara" (polish the pearl). We see students as pearls and so we polish them (Respondent #1)*

*As a Head, you have to think a year ahead and plan well what you want to do for your students. If the past years activities don't suit, you drop the plan and I choose the plan which suits my students' level....then I will try to plan well so the following year it doesn't have any bad impact on my students (Respondent #4).*

Research findings indicate principals prioritize less of their time in monitoring student progress. This is hardly a surprise in Malaysia as teachers are expected to monitor student progress and manage them accordingly.

On the other hand, tests are used to diagnose students weakness, evaluate the results of the school's instructional program, and to help develop classroom assignments. The principal plays a key role in this area as discussed by Hallinger and Wang (2015), they provide teachers with test results in a timely and useful fashion, discuss test results with the staff as a whole, with grade level staff and individual teachers, and provide interpretive analyses for teachers detailing the relevant test data in a concise form. However, this analysis are often done for reporting purpose to the MOE.

#### **Creating Positive School Climate**

This dimension which is broader in scope and intent, includes five specific functions of the principals. It speaks about a culture of a continuous improvement. Instructional leaders are expected to align the schools standard and practices with its mission and create a climate that supports teaching and learning.

#### *f) Protecting Instructional Time*

Since instructional time is standardized by the Ministry of Education, three school leaders followed the direction.



*In addition (to the one hour class after school) there's a Saturday class that takes place twice a month. The interim results from this approach has been an increase in achievement for year 6 pupils in the National exam (Respondent #1)*

*Early morning we'll start with the reading programme, 7.10-7.40 a.m. For year 6 we have extra classes, we'll start lesson for them earlier, official time is 7.40 a.m. (Respondent #2).*

*We are more concerned about year 6 because it's academic and they are about to sit for their UPSR, so we have many extra classes, morning, afternoon, Saturday. We have motivation camp and invite speakers to come to teach answering techniques (Respondent #4).*

Instructional time is one of the most important resources of effective instruction. Therefore, it is important that the principal, as instructional leader, ensures that instructional time is protected and properly managed (Glanz, 2006). Since instructional time is standardized by the MOE, the principals play a minimal role in this aspect. The headmasters however, indicated that extra classes are organized to students who sit for public examinations. These are individual efforts taken with the assistance of other stakeholders in the school like Parent Teachers Association (PIBG).

#### *g) Promoting Professional Development*

All principals mentioned about promoting professional development among the teachers. In some schools initiatives are taken by the principal to have in-house training to develop a better teaching and learning. Discussing about the professional development, the principals has mentioned the following.

*We are now focusing more on academic work. I always call from outside people for courses for the teachers.... I find they need more training about teaching and learning. They improve themselves by attending training with the ministry but I encourage them to do further training. Some teachers are doing masters for example. Some of my teachers also mark papers. It benefits my teachers and my students (Respondent #4).*

*I like to go for conferences, I pay my own money to go for conferences, every year I go, when I come back from conference, I share with my teachers, especially about classroom teaching (Respondent #7).*

*For teachers we have in-house training from teachers who represented the school in outside training. For some teachers, they were sponsored by the PIBG to do the 7 habits of effective people and come back to teach the rest of the school. This happened two years ago and we are seeing the effects now. Other programs include The Leaders in Me (Respondent #11).*

*I train the teachers myself. I train my teachers myself. I don't call other consultants. I did it myself. I train all my English teachers. I'm the trainer (Respondent #14).*

In Malaysian context, it is also identical to note that, teachers and principals are required to attend a certain compulsory of number of 7 hours of in-house training sessions. Besides that, the Teacher Professional Development Sector (TPDS) was established by Ministry of Education Malaysia in 2008. Recognizing the importance of this sector, the Ministry of Education has

placed the Teacher Education Division (TED), Aminuddin Baki Institute (IAB), the School Inspectorate and Quality Assurance Division, and the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education under its purview and responsibility. This sector plans, manages and implements teacher professional development activities throughout the nation with the purpose of providing and achieving quality education. Thus, the Ministry of Education and the District Education Department seem to take more initiative to promote professional development. The principals encourage their teachers to attend these professional development courses.

#### *h) Maintaining High Visibility*

58% of respondents indicated that they maintain high visibility. Since learning walk is a required task to be done by the school leaders, this is a common practice among the principals. Some principals mentioned that they come early in order to interact with non teaching staffs. However, learning walk seems to be a challenging task since high volume of other administrative task at hand.

*I do ensure that I walk around the school every day so teachers can see me. I go into classrooms and I talk to the teachers... On an average day I am bogged down with routine administration, seeing parents etc- but I always try at least for some part of the day to get out and see what is happening in classes... I am in by 7.05 I will be standing by the small gate where pupils come in - this is a 'loving programme' - with all my teachers in charge and one of my deputies. I welcome the pupils to the school- we greet them and the pupils, the kindergarten pupils. (Respondent #1).*

*Everyday I will stand in front of the gate since the day one until today. So, slowly I felt that the parent started to know I am the principal (Respondent #2).*

*Whenever I am in school, usually I will once I scan in, of course I will go down, I will go down my office and then I will go straight to the front gate to meet up with my parents, to meet up with my students, to welcome my students to come back to school, and then in this way, I can more or less know my parents and then whenever they have anything, they will come straightaway to me (Respondent #4).*

It is a common practice among the principals to come early in order to interact with staffs and students. However, this seems to be a challenging task with the high volume of other administrative task at hand. Principals' presence at the school entrance seem to be very beneficial as described by the respondents. They have a closer relationship with the students as well as the parents.

#### *i) Providing Incentive for Teaching*

On the matter of provide incentive for teaching, 50% principals have indicated their conscious effort. Besides the awards given by the Ministry of Education and the District Education Department, some principal recognizes and rewards their teachers for their outstanding performances. Teachers also seem to value the gesture of the principals and do better in their assignments when they are appreciated. Positive Relationship with principal motivates teachers to do more and better.

*Teachers Day means I want to do something for my teachers. Sometimes I buy for them biscuits, small small things also I buy. They'll think la they are appreciated by HM.... Then we have potluck system, monthly once everybody will prepare one item and monthly well celebrate teacher's birthday, we'll buy something for them (Respondent #1).*

*Once a while I would take my teachers out. Recognition is very important they feel that the principal, and they feel that we are working hard she know that she feel that. Once a while in the meeting I tell, I saw a teachers, she have been doing this and is very good, just tell in front of the teachers, in front of the students and you see the teachers is very good. I will praise them, recognition from the principal, they feel much happier. Maybe in the form of certificates once a year. "Hari Kecemerlangan" (Awards Giving Day) once a year we give, besides that, small small things are given once a month when the class performed well I will reward the class teachers (Respondent #2).*

Few principals have gone extra mile in rewarding the teachers with words, certificates and field trips. This has certainly encouraged the teachers. Through observation, it was prevalent that the overseas trips and other trips executed by some of the principals as a mean to reward the teachers has certainly motivated the teachers. The teachers seems very excited talking about them.

#### *j) Providing Incentives for Learning*

In terms of providing incentive for learning, 1 of the principals responded. This aspect of providing incentive may seem less because students who are academically excelling are recognized and awarded at the school award giving day which held once a year.

*We have weekly reward program during the Assembly. Last year one student went to state level to assemble the computer CPU. So we gave him special award that is financial award. Because he came from poor family so we gave cash reward of RM500 to the student (Respondent #3).*

According to Hallinger and Murphy (1985), principals can influence student and teacher attitudes through the creation of a reward structure that reinforces academic achievement and productive effort. However, providing incentives for learning does not seem to be very popular in Malaysian context. However, it is noteworthy that the annual prize giving day for academic achievements are held in every schools yearly.

Research Question Two - How did the Chinese primary school principals view their role as instructional leaders?

A deductive analysis was done as the next step using Murphy (1990), Comprehensive Instructional Leadership framework. Further to that, an inductive approach was used to further draw reoccurring themes from the data collected. From the data the following themes were drawn. It is identical to note that dimensions mentioned in were dominant.

#### **Murphy's Comprehensive Instructional Leadership Framework**

In addition to the PIMRS model, Murphy (1990) have indicated additional seven more functions of an instructional leader thorough this framework. He refined and elaborate the

PIMRS model with a systematic and comprehensive review and integration of the research from four major sources: the literature on effective schools, on school improvement, on staff development, and on organizational change. Based on this review, he sketched and elaborated an instructional leadership framework that consisted of four basic dimensions of instructional leadership broken down into seventeen different roles or behaviors.

Developing mission and goals and managing the instructional programs remained a fundamental feature of instructional leadership. However, he expended to dimension of promoting a positive school climate to include establishing positive expectation and standards. Further to that created the fourth dimension of developing a supportive work environment. Thus, the elaborated model of instructional leadership now had four basic dimension rather than three and 16 functions.

### **Creating Positive School Climate**

#### *Establishing Positive Expectation and Standard*

All principals had indicated that they *establish positive expectations and standards* in the school they lead. Murphy (1990) placed this theme under promoting positive school climate of the PIMRS Model (1985). This sub dimension is highly quoted the principals. The following are some of the quotes from the principals. These expectations seem to motivate the teachers to strive for betterment.

*My main aim is leader is to improve outcomes and in particular to improve the learning achievements of my children and to raise test scores.... it is my aim as a leader to ensure that all children achieve and it is my mission and go to ensure that we meet our targets and improve our Target my main target is to raise the UPSR all schools from 64% to 85% (Respondent #1).*

*I came in our school was in band 4 then 2 years we went band 3 but last year my target is actually band 2, so last year then we worked for band 2 and we got it....Teachers also cannot always depend on HMs. I always tell my teachers - you go to the net, nowadays got a lot of information on the internet. (Respondent #2).*

*I always talk to them, call them. Ask them honestly what they want, and in what areas they can perform. I let them identify what they want to achieve and give them the opportunity to perform. In that way they cannot say they don't want to do or have got nothing to offer. If they really say no, I would suggest to them (Respondent #3).*

*They (teachers) are more in their comfort zone, they felt like ok they got 48 straight As, that's it, they are already satisfied. But when I came there, I told them we can do much better than that. So the only thing I injected that time was I put the confidence level to all my teachers. The following year they got about 65 straight A's.....I will look at both (academically inclined as well as students who are not) and praise all. Excellent student I will guide them to achieve the best and the low achiever at least they are able to speak and write before they go to secondary school (Respondent #4).*

It is obvious from this research that, by establishing positive expectation and standard, the school were able to achieve greater things and upgrade themselves. By setting high expectations for both learners and teachers, the principal builds their confidence in their ability to achieve and this, in turn, will help them to reach the level of expectation.

### **Developing Supportive Work Environment**

Management of people and processes is seen as one of the crucial function of the principal in this fourth dimension of the framework. School leaders are expected to engage in the strategic personal management and develop a working environment that gives the teachers and students all the support they need for teaching and learning. Instructional leaders involve in critical processes such as planning, implementing, supporting, advocating and monitoring every aspect of the curriculum, instruction and improvement plans. They also create supportive work environment which includes professional development opportunities, time an space for staff collaboration and

#### *b) Creating a Safe and Orderly Learning Environment*

From the data, 3 principals mentioned that creating a safe and orderly environment is essential as instructional leaders. Murphy (1990) placed this theme under the dimension of developing supportive work environment. Maintaining the structure of the school building and creating a better classroom environment has been a priority for these principals. The environment seems to play a very important part in teaching and learning.

*I have tried to change the environment by the introduction of a mini zoo and a mini garden. I am invited parents into these programs and encourage them to work with their children. We have many we have many Community programs that the children engage in these improvements and change (Respondent #1).*

*Another thing is the school's facilities, now we are having the board of governors a plan to build another block which consist of 4 stories which include the special classrooms, special classrooms means music room , science room, and activity halls. Currently we have a big hall but for a smaller one, a small auditorium can take about 300-400 students.... I hope that this project can be completed in the end of the year so that we can have more space more room for the students, then we can achieve better results than the previous years (Respondent #2).*

*Recently we do the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. Smart classroom. Most of the classroom, 99% we change the classroom to 21<sup>st</sup> century where the parents help in (Respondent #4).*

Literatures shows that in Malaysia, it is evident that school leaders do play a significant role in improving their school outcomes and promoting learning environment in their schools (Perera et al., 2015; Ghani et. al., 2011; Jainabee & Jamelaa, 2011). As also highlighted in the National Education Blueprint: 'Today, all principals in Malaysia possess the autonomy to shape the learning environment of their respective schools' (Blueprint, 2012, pg 150).

#### *c. Providing Opportunity for Meaningful Student Learning*

The other theme that seemed highly quoted was providing opportunity for meaningful student learning. All principals found saying that opportunities must be created for student learning. Priorities were given to this aspect. Besides academic, principals also seem to create

opportunities on co curriculum and other non-academic activities. Principals were seen to giving consideration for reading programs that enhance the learning abilities of the students.

*I really hope that the community especially for low income, I hope they see that their education is important. They do not have a culture of reading which i wish they had. I am trying to cultivate this- every morning children come before 7 - before they enter the class there is a reading programme. They gather at the assembly hall and they all have to read - if they do have a book they are provided by the library (Respondent #1).*

*Co-curriculum, my school student's ping pong and badminton performance are very good. Recently one of my year 4 student, a girl student she was the champion of MSSM Ping Pong under 12, year 4 student....Badminton up to MSS state level, only Ping Pong is MSSM....Every morning, we have morning learning session when the student come to school at about 7o'clock before the school bell ring about 7.15am. In this 15 minutes times, the students gradually come join the class, when they step into the class they will have their learning, for example, so Tuesday will be English and following day will be Bahasa Malaysia (Respondent #2).*

*Our students are learning leadership skills from the teachers. We give them (MC, prefects, monitors etc) opportunity to perform with the training from teachers. They learned from observation (Respondent #3).*

*My best practices so far been more than 3 years every morning I'll be with my students at the assembly point. We had started 3 years ago. The name of the program is VAKS. We focus on the Visual, Audio, Kinetics, and Spiritual. We have a simple exercise, we tune to a soothing song in the morning....I notice the student can focus more and the discipline is much better. They can improve even though it takes 5 minute every morning before the school started they have to be at the assembly point just 5 minutes and then they will enter the classes. (Respondent #4).*

The students grow holistically when instructional leaders provide opportunities for student learning. Its also build the self-esteem of the students and encourageous them to perform better. This in turn brings about positive outcome in the schools as denoted by Murphy (1990).

It is also the aspiration of the Ministry of Education as stipulated in the Blueprint (2012) that student learning must be holistic and engaging the broader community. Schools are also deemed too reach out to their broader communities to collaborate on improving student learning. This collaboration will include activities that are student centered (potentially including initiatives such as mentorship programs, student trips, job shadowing), school centered (including sponsorship of school equipment and materials, classroom assistance), and community centered (such as community service, student performances). These initiatives will be important across all schools, but will be particularly critical in underprivileged communities (Blueprint, 2012. p. 211).

*d) Developing Staff Collaboration*

Developing staff collaboration is a theme that was mentioned by the entire group of respondents. This is something widely promoted among the schools by principals for an effective teaching and learning. The success of leadership is also attributed towards this collaborative effort. Other words like “team work” are also used by the principals to emphasize this collaborative effort. Often these principals seem to give autonomy to the fellow colleagues in order that task and goals are achieved. Following are some quotes mentioned by the principals.

*I believe in shared leadership and a collaborative approach. But there are rules to follow you know so we must also follow what the ministry says. I cannot know everything so I find it is OK to ask others their point of view. I seek help where I can but I know my responsibilities as a principal (Respondent #1).*

*Go for the best after discussion with all my colleagues then the chance of having a wrong decision is lesser.... When I taught in my class I asked my senior assistant to sit behind. I practiced a few times. Not observe just give some comments when I'm teaching cause I don't know the way of my teaching method is relevant to the class or not. (Respondent #2).*

*My staffs are collaborative. Yes, that's the strength of my staff. Very good collaboration from every aspect. Also my support staff, they are close to each other.... I do a lot of empowerment. I distribute work to all my Senior Assistants and I have given them some of the authority to pass down some of their work to teachers. They also cannot do all the work so its empowerment all the way down to the teachers. I definitely distribute my leadership (Respondent #3).*

*Most of the problem we're having is the team work, when you do something, you must have full support from the members. That is why I build a team. When you give some work to them, the team must be 6 or 7. They together do the work. So when you build the teamwork, then you can see the success. That is the most important formula for my leadership. The teamwork. (Respondent #4).*

This research ascertains that peer collaboration among teachers builds healthy relationships through communication, caring and trust; helps teachers structure learning experiences, facilitates effective planning and organizing for instruction; fosters sharing of techniques and materials; and improves teachers classroom management as described by Blasé & Blasé (2000), Fink & Resnick (2001), and Gupton (2003). Not surprisingly then, Blasé et al (2000), found that high performing principals also encouraged teachers to routinely help their colleagues improve teaching and learning.

However, the aspiration of principals collaborating with staff, students, and community, to develop and communicate shared goals as described by Murphy (1990), is contrary to Park & Ham (2014), research. They examined teacher's collaboration across three Asia-Pacific countries (Australia, Malaysia, and South Korea), focusing on the possibility that principal-teacher perceptual disagreement regarding principal instructional leadership. The data results shows that, teachers become more likely to establish collegial relationships with other

teachers in a situation where there is little principal-teacher disagreement regarding principal leadership performance.

*e) Securing Outside Resources to Achieve School Goals*

50% principals also seem to actively involved in securing outside resources to achieve school goals. Most instances the Parents & Teachers association and the Board of Directors play an important role in assisting the principals to secure funds and other means to improve teaching and learning in the school. Parents also seem to be contributing towards the needs of the school. However, it is identical to note that principals play a very important role in securing outside resources.

*So I have discussed with the PIBG chairman, since this girl has so excellent achievement in the Ping Pong, this year we try to get coach from outside for the school, recently we are having a coach from the teacher, but it's not good enough because we want to maintain that the year 4 girl to become continuously become the champion for the future. So we're getting external coach to come in but we have to pay more. I talked to the PIBG committee and they all agreed to bring in external coach (Respondent #2).*

*If the school did not open their mouth and ask for help, they won't come into the school. But slowly now we are doing this thing through the PIBG, the parent association. For example, recently, we have cross-country activity and I already have 26 volunteers means the parents they volunteer come to do the road guide for the students.... For me my school is very small and the field condition is not good. So, we circulate out a notice to invite parents to help. We do two times to prepare school field for sports days. They were very supportive, some parents said next time if you need any help you can inform us. Even some they bring their grandparents to help. (Respondent #4).*

This dimension is also discussed at the shift 9 of the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025). A partnership with parents, community and private sectors is seen as important to make learning happens well beyond the school walls as well as to contribute expertise to the school's development (Fullan (2007). The involvement of all these stakeholders will create a learning ecosystem that reinforces the knowledge, skills, and values taught to students at school. In order to compellingly securing outside resources to achieve school goals the principals needs a good people relationship, a good exposure to the outside world, a keen knowledge of the availability of resources, and competence to bring forth the needs of the school clearly and constructively. Another effort that may enhance would be, as Gupton (2003), suggested for the school leader to attend social events outside the school but based in the community. This opens the lines of communication and offers an opportunity for getting acquainted with staff and community outside of the school environment.

*f) Forging Link between Home and School*

In order to have a greater learning outcome for students, 79% principals sees the importance of forging link between home and the school as part of their leadership. Though this is also seen as a challenging task, they see it as a very important responsibility. The relationship build with the parents and home of the students also seen to reduce parental complains and enhances parent's involvement in the student's academic matters. Besides that parents involvement in the school also enable the school to have enhancing activities. For instance in



one school Foster Mother “Ibu Penyayang” programmes is carried out to encourage and assist students who are slow in academic studies. Such programs and other support from the parents are only feasible with a positive link between school and home.

*The beliefs that I hold all that's an improvement comes about through close links with the community. therefore I have spent a great deal of time with the Parents Teachers Association and the community organizations to generate a better working relationship..... I try to involve parents, as i said before we try and get them into the school in various ways. It is hard but we keep on trying as this is important for our students' success. (Respondent #1).*

*I believe that Parents do play an important role in their children's education. If they don't take the initiative to ensure their progress in school, then we also will have a hard time (Respondent #3).*

Principals shared the links between parents and school appears to minimize tensions between the parents and school and create a safe and orderly learning environment with less problems. This helps enhance the teaching and learning process in the school. There are no specific literature is found on this sub dimension of forging link between home and school. However, the effects of family characteristics like socioeconomic status, cultural background and ethnicity on family involvement in education have been explored by researchers though the synthesis presented are still unclear (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ming Chiu, Ho Sui-Chu, 2006).

### **Other Emerging Themes**

Beside the deductive analysis using the existing model of Instructional leadership, the researcher also identified other reoccurring themes from the data through an inductive analysis. The following themes which were drawn seem to and explains the successful change happened in the school especially in relation to the instructional effectiveness and school improvement.

#### *a) Sense of Responsibility*

83% principals have mentioned on the importance of having a sense of responsibility in bringing the school to betterment and to impact the lives of the students not only academically but also to build them as a person. The school leaders and teachers play a very crucial role in believing the student as a potential person and take responsibility in molding them. Understanding their backgrounds and taking personal interest is also considered as important. Disciplining students is also seen an important responsibility of the teachers and school leaders. Principals who mentioned on this dimension seem to have experienced positive turn around in academic achievements.

*As I was given the opportunity to lead the school, it is my responsibility to take it forward. I feel happy and pleased that I can take the school forward. This is a joy to me to move the school forward..... There are tasks only I can do because I am responsible to the District and the Ministry for these things. Like the school achievement, I must ensure we still perform at the highest level. That is my job. I show them the way (Respondent #1).*

*I have to carry out my responsibility and my task every day normally I reach school very early.... My first objective is to upgrade the passing percentage of the school (Respondent #2).*

*We have to take care of students learning and academic result. I mean this is a very big portion also of my responsibilities. Sometimes, the school is good or not good they just judge on their academic achievement (Respondent #4).*

From the responses, it is also obvious that the principals feel accountable for the progress and the regress that takes place in the school. Thus the many principals are seen to be taking on the responsibility of managing their school in the aspect of academic achievement.

#### *b) Higher Authority Expectation*

Besides the leadership roles as principals, 67% of the respondents also quoted on their managerial responsibilities they are coping with. For instance these principals mentioned that fulfilling the requirements of the higher authority has been their major task and their daily cores. This always takes much of their time in the school. However, these requirements are essential to be fulfilled. Most times, principals are also expected to attend meetings organized by the District, State as well as Ministry of Education.

*The school's results are very important to the Ministry - I am judged on that. As I mentioned earlier, results are everything- we have to do our best (Respondent #1).*

*Like standard 6 we got our program we know the syllabus, especially this year UPSR we have new format. This year we increase one more subject.... PPD already mentioned every month we have to choose 10% of the teachers. We will go in to sit in for the teaching and learning process..... New teachers mean that this year is the first year they just came out from the IPG so they need guidance and we have to. So, like my practice after I saw them then I will ask them when you are free at a same day, you come and see me then I will jot down what are the positive which part you do it very well and then which part need improvement and then I will explain to them. And then we need to report the grading and then this one we need to report to PPD (Respondent #4).*

Looking at the general responses from the principal as described above, in essence, it is evident that a school principal has general managerial duties as well as instructional leadership duties to fulfill. A narrow definition of instructional leadership would see these two facets as operating separately. A broader view of instructional leadership would expand this definition to include the principal giving attention to both instructional and non-instructional tasks (MacNeill et al., 2003). Bush (2007), is of the firm belief that leadership and management should be regarded as equally important if schools are to operate effectively and achieve their objectives. He maintains that management should be linked closely to the achievement of certain educational goals. If not, it could lead to a stress on procedures at the expense of educational purpose and values.

#### *c) Role Modeling*

50% principals have indicated that role modeling is essential in fulfilling their roles as a leader. They lead by example and demonstrate in their walk what is expected from the teachers.

Living an exemplary life is considered important. Some also indicated they have role models who made them who they are today.

*I model how I want teachers to be. I am punctual to their lessons, I give proper feedback, I listen to what they have to say (Respondent #1).*

*I leave my house very early, 5.30 I'll be in school, but I got to show a good example for my teachers. My teachers, even the school starts at 7.40, I'll ask them, 90 percent will be in school before 7.00 a.m. Since I can reach by 6.30, so normally they don't give me excuses, basically its leadership by example.... We must be good example for them, and the teachers must be good examples for the students.... Have you heard about the XYZ School, Seremban, very good in 21st century classroom, so I am going to take all my teachers to that school, I am sponsoring, food all I arrange, I am paying everything on my own, they all don't have to spend a single cent, I want them all to go and see and learn. (Respondent #2).*

It is identical to note that high performing principals, who participated in the Blasé et al. (2010), study worked hard to become exemplars of educational leadership and by doing this they served as role models for teachers. Bass and Avolio (1994), characterize idealized influence or charisma as the way leaders behave resulting in the leader becoming a role model for the members of the organization. Yasin, Pihie, Fooi, Basri, & Baki, (2016), indicated that to be instructional leadership is to portrays 'role model' toward the teachers, staff and the whole organization. Indeed this is inspires the teachers and staffs which in turn increase the school performance. According to the Blueprint (2012), it is aspired that a peer-led culture of professional excellence is to be created among teachers wherein school leaders mentor and train one another, develop and disseminate best practices and hold their peers accountable for meeting professional standards.

#### *e) Managerial Assertiveness*

Managerial assertiveness is also a factor that was seen to be repeated among the respondents. 58% principals mentioned that they are assertive when it comes to fulfilling task assigned to the teachers. The teachers and staffs are also expected to be punctual and disciplined. These principals feel that being firm is essential. Orderliness and following the laws and orders are of utmost important. Teachers and staff who do not confine to the order and gives problem will be removed from the team. Sometimes they are mentioned as autocratic leaders to fulfill the task given and achieve set goals.

*I only give feedback to teachers during the formal meeting and I will see them personally after I observe them (Respondent #1).*

*This is very relaxed, but the work has to be done. I don't care when they do it or how they do it as long as the work is done. When the deadline comes then the work must be done. And this is how I want things done. When and how you do it doesn't matter to me but it has to be done on the teachers know this (Respondent #2).*

*If I'm supposed to do something then I'll make sure I do it. If my teachers are supposed to do something then they must do it too. I will support them but they are responsible (Respondent #3).*

*When you give every chance to them, they still don't change, I'll talk to the PPD, transfer to other school. That is my last choice. So they have to do it, if they don't do it, they will spoil others. That is my last choice. If there is many chances already, I have to take the action. If I don't take action, it will spoil others (Respondent #4).*

It is also evident from the TALIS report (OECD, 2014) that teachers believe that a teacher will be dismissed for sustained poor performance in their school. This shows the managerial assertiveness of the principal in the school.

The instructional leadership framework in this study may be summarized in the picture of a pyramid as shown in Figure 5.1. The pyramid indicates the density of the dimensions from the response of the principals from the highly weighed at the bottom to the lowly weighed at the top. Dimension I on Fulfilling Managerial and Management Responsibilities, followed by Dimension II on Developing Supportive Work Environment; then Dimension III Creating Positive School Climate; precede by Dimension IV, Managing Instructional Programmes; and finally Dimension VI Creating School Mission. The red arrow up indicates the principals function as Instructional Leaders along the specified dimensions which begins from Dimension II up to Dimension V. On the other hand blue arrow indicate the principals function as Instructional Managers fulfilling their requirement and job descriptions being in the leadership seat at their respective school as specified in the dimensions which begins from Dimension I up to Dimension V.

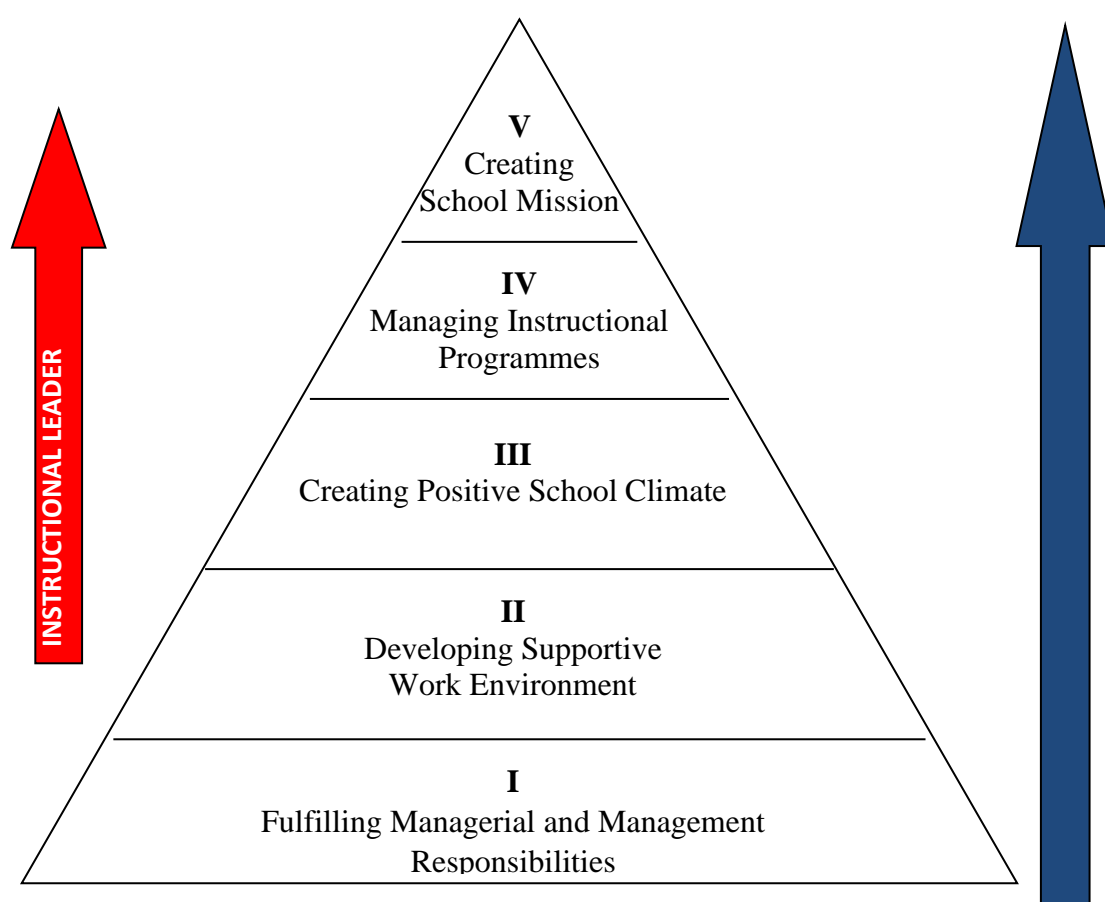


Figure 5.1 Instructional Leadership Pyramid from the research findings and discussion

The current study has revealed that principals can't avoid giving attention to administrative duties as it comes as directive from higher authorities and thus focus to instructional leadership functions may be challenged. However, it is important for principals to balance their administrative and instructional leadership roles. Studies may be done to see how the principals balance between being the administrator and instructional leaders. This study certainly gives a picture if the principals are being leaders or managers the most in their practice.

### **Discussions**

While this study focuses on Chinese primary schools in Selangor, future research could be extended to include other states in Malaysia or even internationally. This would provide comparative insights and help identify any regional differences in instructional leadership practices. Instructional leadership could be further explored in both high-performing and underperforming schools to examine how leadership strategies vary across different performance levels. This could offer a more balanced view of the challenges and practices principals face in different school environments.

Furthermore, understanding instructional leadership solely from the perspective of principals may limit the depth of insights. Future research could involve teachers to gain a holistic understanding of how instructional leadership practices affect teaching and learning outcomes, and how these practices directly influence student academic performance and overall school success. This would provide evidence of the effectiveness of specific instructional leadership strategies.

The findings shed light on the current limitations faced by principals, where heavy management duties impede their capacity to focus on enhancing classroom teaching and learning. This underscores the motivation for the study: to understand how instructional leadership is practiced in Malaysian schools and identify actionable insights that can drive meaningful improvements in educational outcomes.

### **Limitations**

According to Simon (2011), limitations are potential weakness in the study and are issues that are not in the researcher's control. These are shortcomings, problems and circumstances which the researcher cannot control but might cause dispute in the research methodology and research findings. Since it may sway the findings and the results, limitations are finest if acknowledged in research. The limitations also may open possible avenues for further research in the subject matter.

### **Conclusion**

The Malaysian school system prioritizes improvement, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, following low rankings in global assessments. Instructional leadership (IL) is seen as critical for effective schools, with research showing that principals focusing on curriculum and instruction positively impact student outcomes. However, Malaysian principals often adopt more administrative than instructional roles, facing heavy management tasks that limit their focus on teaching quality. Studies on IL in Malaysia are limited, with most local literature in Bahasa Malaysia, restricting international exposure. Research suggests the Hallinger and Murphy IL Model (1985) is partially applied, while

Murphy's framework (1990) aligns better with local practices. The Ministry of Education aims to reduce principals' administrative burdens to enhance their instructional role and improve student outcomes.

## References

- Goldring, E., Cravens, X., Porter, A., Murphy, J., & Elliott, S. (2015). The convergent and divergent validity of the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED). *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(2), 177–196. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-06-2013-0067>
- Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(2), 217–247. <https://doi.org/10.1086/461445>
- Liu, S., & Hallinger, P. (2018). Principal Instructional Leadership, Teacher Self-Efficacy, and Teacher Professional Learning in China: Testing a Mediated-Effects Model. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(4), 501–528. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x18769048>
- Hallinger, P. (2003). Reshaping the landscape of school leadership development. In *Taylor & Francis eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203970935>
- Harris, A., Jones, M., Cheah, K. S. L., Devadason, E., & Adams, D. (2017). Exploring principals' instructional leadership practices in Malaysia: insights and implications. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(2), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-05-2016-0051> PISA 2015 Report <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf> PISA 2012 Report <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf>
- Jones, M., Adams, D., Joo, M. T. H., Muniandy, V., Perera, C. J., & Harris, A. (2015). Contemporary challenges and changes: principals' leadership practices in Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 35(3), 353–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2015.1056591>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800060>
- Bamburg, J. D., & Andrews, R. L. (1990). Instructional Leadership, School Goals, and Student Achievement: Exploring the Relationship between Means and Ends.
- Hallinger, P., & Bryant, D. (2013). Mapping the terrain of educational leadership and management in East Asia. *Journal of educational administration*, 51(5), 618–637
- Bajunid, I. (2005). Rethinking the work of teachers and school leaders in an age of change. In *The life and work of teachers* (pp. 177-196). Routledge.
- Sharma, P. N. (2018). Moving beyond the employee: The role of the organizational context in leader workplace aggression. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), 203-217.
- Sharma, S., Yusoff, M., Kannan, S., & Baba, S. B. (2011). Concerns of teachers and principals on instructional supervision in three Asian countries. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, 1(3), 214
- Aziz, N. A. A., Fooi, F. S., Asimiran, S., & Hassan, A. (2015). Literature review on the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teacher readiness to implement change. *Researchers World*, 6(1), 12
- Ail, N. M. B. M., bin Taib, M. R., bt Jaafar, H., & bin Omar, M. N. (2015). Principals' instructional leadership and teachers' commitment in three Mara junior Science Colleges (Mjsc) in Pahang, Malaysia. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, 1848-1853

- Yasin, M. M., Bashah, M. H. A., Zainal, H. Y., Pihie, Z. A. B. L., Fooi, F. S., & Basri, R. B. (2016). The ideology of instructional leadership among principals on student academic achievement. *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2(3), 390-395
- Alig-Mielcarek, J. M. (2003). *A model of school success: Instructional leadership, academic press, and student achievement*. The Ohio State University
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School effectiveness and school improvement*, 9(2), 157-191
- Gupton, S. L. (2010). *The instructional leadership toolbox: A handbook for improving practice*. Corwin Press
- MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(1), 73-84
- Yin, R. K. (1994). Discovering the future of the case study. Method in evaluation research. *Evaluation practice*, 15(3), 283-290
- Tellis, W. (1997). Introduction to case study. *The qualitative report*, 3(2), 1-14
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*, 1(1), 1-17
- Tsang, E. W., & Kwan, K. M. (1999). Replication and theory development in organizational science: A critical realist perspective. *Academy of Management review*, 24(4), 759-780
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). Steps in conducting a scholarly mixed methods study
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry*, MyEducationLab Series. Pearson
- Baker, S. E., & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough
- Sandelowski, M. (1993). Rigor or rigor mortis: The problem of rigor in qualitative research revisited. *Advances in nursing science*, 16(2), 1-8
- Miles, M. B. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook. *Thousand Oaks*
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of mixed methods research*, 1(1), 77-100
- Simon, M. (2011). Assumptions, limitations and delimitations