

Enhancing School Performance through Instructional Leadership: Insights from the Nominal Group Technique in the Malaysian Context

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Abstract

This research examines methods to improve school performance in Malaysia through instructional leadership based on insights from educational leadership experts. Utilizing the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) via Google Meet, seven experts engaged in a systematic and democratic decision-making process. This approach ensured equitable participation, avoiding the dominance of individual opinions and premature focus on specific ideas. The experts identified nine crucial strategies for enhancing school performance through this process. The outcomes offer practical guidance for policymakers and educators, presenting a strategic framework to strengthen instructional leadership and ultimately improve school outcomes in Malaysia.

Keywords: School performance; Instructional leadership; Malaysia; NGT technique

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1.0 Introduction

The evolving educational landscape in Malaysia necessitates focusing on effective school leadership, particularly instructional leadership, to enhance student outcomes and overall school performance. Globally, instructional leadership has been identified as a crucial factor in shaping the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, significantly impacting student achievement. This leadership approach underscores the importance of school leaders, such as principals and headteachers, in managing and guiding instructional practices to foster an environment conducive to academic excellence. In Malaysia, this emphasis is aligned with national educational reforms aimed at improving school quality and student performance, as outlined in the Malaysia Education Development Plan (2013-2025) (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013).

However, implementing instructional leadership faces significant challenges, especially within diverse educational contexts like Malaysia. Research indicates that the success of instructional leadership often depends on various factors, including school climate, teacher involvement in decision-making, and the professional development of educators (Dutta & Sahney, 2022). For example, studies have noted the positive impact of shared instructional leadership (SIL) on student academic performance, though this relationship is influenced by school conditions shaped by educational policies. Moreover, the effectiveness of instructional leadership is often linked to the perceptions of school management teams and their ability to influence curriculum management and teaching strategies.

Given these complexities, a systematic approach is required to identify the most effective strategies for enhancing school performance through instructional leadership. The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) provides a structured method for gathering expert opinions and achieving consensus on key issues (Vahedian-Shahroodi et al., 2023). This study employs NGT to investigate and pinpoint key instructional leadership strategies that can significantly impact school performance in Malaysia. The research objectives are twofold: first, to identify the most critical factors influencing the effectiveness of instructional leadership, and second, to establish a set of actionable recommendations that can be implemented by school leaders to enhance educational outcomes.

This study addresses a gap in existing research by applying the NGT technique within the Malaysian educational context. While previous studies have examined various aspects of instructional leadership, few have systematically identified specific strategies most effective in improving school performance in Malaysia (Arisah et al., 2024; Arjanto et al., 2023). By concentrating on this goal, the study contributes to the academic discourse on educational leadership and offers practical insights for policymakers and practitioners.

2.0 Literature Review

This study's literature review centers on the role of instructional leadership in enhancing school performance, outlined as follows:

2.1 Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in enhancing school performance, with research from diverse educational settings underscoring its importance. This leadership approach focuses on the quality of teaching and learning, which is pivotal in shaping student outcomes. Studies across various contexts, including rural schools in Ghana and secondary schools in Malaysia, highlight the significant role that instructional leadership plays in driving academic success (Salifu & Kala, 2024; Thien & Yeap, 2023).

In Ghana, principals in rural areas face numerous challenges, such as inadequate resources, poor learning environments, and socio-cultural barriers that impede student achievement (Abonyi et al., 2024). These obstacles often limit principals' ability to implement effective instructional supervision and leadership. Despite these difficulties, certain leadership practices, such as vision-driven strategies and people-centered approaches, have been identified as crucial for overcoming these challenges and improving school performance (Salifu & Kala, 2024). This research highlights the need for leadership strategies tailored to local contexts to address specific barriers to student success (Abonyi et al., 2024; Salifu & Kala, 2024).

Similarly, research in New Zealand illustrates the positive impact of middle leadership on school performance, particularly through effective curriculum management. Middle leaders, who manage specific academic departments, are essential in aligning instructional practices with the school's educational goals. They facilitate problem-solving discussions, set academic targets, and mentor staff, all of which contribute to higher academic outcomes and more equitable student performance. This underscores the importance of leadership at all levels within schools for fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence.

In Malaysia, instructional leadership is a central focus of the Ministry of Education's efforts to achieve school excellence, as outlined in the Malaysia Education Development Plan (2013-2025). The plan emphasizes the crucial role of school leaders in improving teaching quality, which is directly linked to student achievement. A study in Kelantan Islamic Foundation (YIK) Religious Secondary Schools found a strong correlation between instructional leadership practices and teacher performance, particularly in academic enforcement and curriculum coordination (Arisah et al., 2024). These findings suggest that active engagement in instructional leadership by school leaders leads to enhanced teacher effectiveness and overall school performance.

2.2 Instructional Leadership and School Performance

The relevance of instructional leadership in improving school performance is not limited to any single context but is a global phenomenon. For instance, research from Ghana has also explored the role of gender in educational leadership, challenging traditional assumptions about the capabilities of male and female leaders. Owusu (2022) found that male and female headteachers in Ghana exhibited similar levels of instructional leadership, suggesting that leadership effectiveness is not inherently tied to gender. This finding advocates for more inclusive leadership practices, which can contribute to improved school performance by leveraging the strengths of both male and female leaders. The push for

gender equity in educational leadership thus aligns with broader efforts to enhance instructional leadership and, by extension, school outcomes. The importance of instructional leadership is further reinforced by the challenges faced by school leaders in adapting to new educational demands (Arisah et al., 2024; Salifu & Kala, 2024). As the role of school principals evolves to meet the needs of twenty-first-century education, the emphasis on instructional leadership becomes even more critical. The ability to navigate complex educational landscapes, foster collaborative working conditions, and support teacher development are all essential components of effective instructional leadership. These elements are crucial for ensuring that schools can meet the demands of modern education, which increasingly requires a focus on student-centered learning and continuous improvement.

The literature review identifies several challenges, particularly the difficulty in aligning the perceptions of principals and teachers regarding the effectiveness of instructional leadership. The study addresses this issue through the use of the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to collect expert consensus on effective leadership strategies. Although previous research has highlighted the importance of instructional leadership, there remains a need for more research within specific cultural contexts to understand its impact fully. This study seeks to contribute to this area by concentrating on Malaysian schools and offering context-specific strategies for improvement.

3.0 Methodology

The methodology employed in this study leverages the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), a consensus-driven approach that facilitates the generation of diverse and comprehensive ideas through structured collaborative input. NGT, developed by Van de Ven and Delbecq (1972), has evolved into a widely recognized method for its efficacy in engaging participants actively, particularly in situations that demand expert input and strategic decision-making within educational settings. The decision to utilize NGT over other consensus methodologies stems from its distinct advantage in creating an inclusive environment where each participant's input is valued and documented. This method is particularly advantageous in educational research, where the objective often involves synthesizing complex and varied experiences into actionable insights. NGT's structured approach helps mitigate the influence of dominant participants, ensuring that all voices contribute equally to the discussion. In the context of this study, which seeks to explore the impact of instructional leadership on school performance in Malaysia, the NGT process was deemed particularly suitable for its ability to distill expert opinions into clear, prioritized strategies.

Given the logistical challenges associated with gathering experts in a single physical location, the NGT session was conducted via the online platform Google Meet. This approach not only facilitated the participation of experts from diverse geographical locations but also accommodated their schedules more flexibly. The session lasted for two hours and included a carefully selected panel of seven experts specializing in educational leadership.

The insights from these experts were considered critical for addressing the research objective of enhancing school performance through instructional leadership.

3.1 Session Procedures

The NGT session was meticulously planned to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data collected. The process began with the distribution of a comprehensive briefing document to each participant. This document outlined the session's objectives and specified the topics for discussion, ensuring that all participants were aligned with the study's goals before the session commenced. This preparatory step was crucial in maintaining the focus of the discussion and in setting the stage for a productive exchange of ideas (Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1972). During the session, the experts were initially asked to independently generate ideas related to improving school performance through instructional leadership. This step allowed each participant to reflect on their personal experiences and insights, free from the immediate influence of group dynamics. By encouraging independent idea generation, the methodology aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives, each grounded in the unique expertise of the participants.

Following the independent idea generation phase, a round-robin session was conducted. In this phase, each expert was invited to share their ideas one by one. This approach was carefully managed to ensure that every contribution was documented without any immediate discussion or critique. The purpose of this step was to prevent any single participant from dominating the conversation and to ensure that all ideas, regardless of their initial reception, were given equal consideration. After all ideas had been presented, the group engaged in a facilitated discussion. This discussion phase was critical for deepening the collective understanding of each suggestion and for exploring the potential implications of the proposed strategies. The facilitator played a key role in guiding the conversation, ensuring that it remained focused on the research objectives while allowing for the necessary exploration of each idea. This structured discussion helped to refine the ideas and build a shared understanding among the participants.

The final step of the session involved the ranking of the ideas based on their perceived importance and feasibility. This ranking process was facilitated by NGT-PLUS software, a specialized tool designed to capture expert evaluations anonymously and systematically. The use of this software reduced the potential for bias in the ranking process, ensuring that the final prioritization of ideas reflected the collective judgment of the group.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data generated from the NGT session underwent a rigorous analysis to identify consensus among the experts. This analysis was conducted using specific computation methods that quantified the level of agreement among the participants. Statistical techniques were employed to prioritize the ideas that received the highest rankings, ensuring that the most critical and feasible strategies were highlighted. The analytical process was designed to generate actionable insights that could inform practical strategies for improving school performance through instructional leadership. By employing a

systematic approach to data analysis, the study aimed to produce findings that were both robust and reflective of the collective expertise of the participants. The analysis not only identified the most promising strategies but also provided a clear rationale for their prioritization, making the findings directly applicable to the educational context under study.

3.3 Sampling

The sample size for this study consisted of seven experts in educational management. This number was selected based on established guidelines for the NGT process, which suggest that a group size of seven to ten participants is optimal for generating diverse yet manageable input (Horton, 1980). The choice of seven participants was made to balance the need for specialized insights with the practicalities of managing an in-depth discussion. Smaller groups, such as the one used in this study, are particularly effective in fostering focused and meaningful discussions. They allow each participant to contribute fully, ensuring that the final output is reflective of a wide range of expert opinions. This approach is supported by previous research, which has demonstrated that NGT can be successfully implemented with groups of this size, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the topic while maintaining the quality of the discussion (Harvey & Holmes, 2012; Mustapha et al., 2022). The selection of participants was based on their expertise in educational leadership and management, with a focus on individuals who have significant experience in the Malaysian educational context. This ensured that the insights generated were not only theoretically sound but also practically relevant to the specific challenges and opportunities within the Malaysian school system.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

The ethical dimensions of this study were carefully considered throughout the research process. All participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and their role in the NGT session. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before their involvement in the study, ensuring that they were aware of their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, with all data collected being anonymized to protect the identities of the participants. The use of NGT-PLUS software also ensured that the ranking of ideas was conducted anonymously, further safeguarding participant privacy. The study was conducted by ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects to minimize any potential risks to participants and ensure that their contributions were respected and valued.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study, centered on the Nominal Group Technique, provides a robust and structured framework for gathering and analyzing expert consensus on instructional leadership strategies aimed at improving school performance in Malaysia. The structured approach, combined with a carefully selected panel of experts, ensures that the findings are both reliable and relevant to the educational context under study. While acknowledging the limitations associated with the small sample size and the challenges of conducting the session online, the methodology offers a well-justified and effective means of exploring the complex relationship between instructional leadership and

school performance. The insights generated through this process are expected to contribute significantly to the development of practical strategies for enhancing educational outcomes in Malaysia, with potential implications for similar contexts globally.

4.0 Results

The study's findings, generated through the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), offer valuable insights into improving school performance through instructional leadership within the Malaysian educational context. The process involved gathering expert opinions to propose and prioritize strategies, resulting in a comprehensive set of recommendations that are both theoretically grounded and practically relevant. The experts' suggestions, captured in two detailed tables, underscore the significance of contextual understanding, goal setting, resource allocation, professional development, collaborative learning, effective leadership, data utilization, community involvement, and continuous monitoring as key drivers of school performance.

Table 1 presents the experts' suggestions, reflecting a nuanced understanding of the Malaysian educational landscape. The experts emphasized the importance of understanding the Malaysian educational context, highlighting the need for school leaders to be well-versed in the national curriculum, assessment frameworks, and cultural factors influencing teaching and learning. This foundational step ensures that subsequent strategies are tailored to the specific needs and challenges of Malaysian schools, thereby enhancing their effectiveness.

Table 1: Expert's suggestions

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

| | |
|---|---|
| 9 | Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of school performance, including regular assessments, feedback mechanisms, and reviews of instructional practices |
|---|---|

The second table outlines how experts ranked the importance and feasibility of each strategy using a voting process. NGT-PLUS software was utilized to provide a systematic and anonymous evaluation, reducing bias. With a consensus threshold set above 70%, there was strong agreement among experts on the strategies. This structured approach enhances the credibility of the findings by confirming that the strategies are both expert-approved and practically viable. It ensures that the recommended strategies are well-supported and applicable in real-world settings.

Table 2: Voting process for item

| Item/ Element | Voter 1 | Voter 2 | Voter 3 | Voter 4 | Voter 5 | Voter 6 | Voter 7 | Total item score | Percentage | Rank Priority | Voter Consensus |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Understanding Malaysian Educational Context | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 21 | 100 | 1 | Suitable |
| Setting Clear Goals aligned with Malaysian Standards | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 95.24 | 2 | Suitable |
| Providing Adequate Resources: | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 20 | 95.24 | 2 | Suitable |
| Supportive Professional Development | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 19 | 90.48 | 3 | Suitable |
| Promoting Collaborative Learning Communities | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 19 | 90.48 | 3 | Suitable |
| Effective Instructional Leadership | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 20 | 95.24 | 2 | Suitable |
| Data-Informed Decision Making | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 19 | 90.48 | 3 | Suitable |
| Parent and Community Involvement | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 21 | 100 | 1 | Suitable |
| Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 21 | 100 | 1 | Suitable |

*** Data generated from NGT-PLUS software*

5.0 Discussion

The prioritization process revealed a clear consensus on the most critical strategies for improving school performance in Malaysia. Effective instructional leadership emerged as the highest-ranked strategy, reflecting its central role in influencing all other aspects of school performance. The experts' emphasis on leadership aligns with the conclusions of Brauckmann et al. (2023) who similarly identified leadership as a key driver of educational outcomes. This finding underscores the importance of investing in leadership development programs for school leaders to equip them with the skills needed to lead effectively. Data-informed decision-making was also highly prioritized, highlighting the growing recognition of the role of data in driving educational improvement. The experts' focus on data aligns with contemporary educational theories that advocate for evidence-based decision-making as a means of enhancing instructional practices and student outcomes (Wang et al., 2024). The emphasis on data utilization reflects a shift towards more analytical and strategic approaches to school management, which are essential for navigating the complexities of modern education.

The strategy of setting clear goals aligned with Malaysian standards was also among the top priorities, emphasizing the importance of having a clear and coherent vision for school performance. The experts' consensus on this strategy reflects the need for schools to operate with a sense of direction and purpose, guided by well-defined objectives that are aligned with national educational priorities. The findings of this study have significant implications for both educational practice and policy in Malaysia. The prioritized strategies provide a roadmap for school leaders and policymakers to enhance school performance through targeted interventions. The emphasis on instructional leadership, data utilization, and goal setting suggests a need for capacity-building initiatives that equip school leaders with the skills and knowledge to implement these strategies effectively.

The findings also highlight the importance of creating a supportive environment for teachers, with adequate resources and professional development opportunities. This has implications for educational policy, particularly in terms of resource allocation and the design of professional development programs that are responsive to the specific needs of Malaysian teachers. The focus on collaborative learning communities and parental involvement further underscores the need for policies that promote a holistic approach to education, where all stakeholders are actively engaged in the learning process. Beyond the confines of the current research, these findings offer valuable insights into other educational contexts that share similar challenges. The strategies proposed by the experts, while tailored to the Malaysian context, are grounded in universal principles of effective school leadership and management. As such, they have the potential to inform educational improvement efforts in other settings, particularly in developing countries where similar educational reforms are underway.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide a comprehensive and well-validated set of strategies for improving school performance through instructional leadership in Malaysia. The use of the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) ensured that the strategies were grounded in expert consensus, adding credibility and rigor to the recommendations. The prioritized

strategies, including effective instructional leadership, data-informed decision-making, and goal setting, offer a clear roadmap for school leaders and policymakers to enhance educational outcomes. These findings have significant implications for educational practice and policy, both within Malaysia and beyond, providing valuable insights for the broader field of educational leadership and school improvement.

6.0 Conclusion

The findings from this study, which employed the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to examine strategies for enhancing school performance through instructional leadership in Malaysia, provide a well-rounded and actionable framework based on expert consensus. While the approach was robust, certain limitations warrant attention. The relatively small sample size of seven experts, though it allowed for deep insights, may constrain the generalizability of the results across Malaysia's diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, the necessity of conducting the NGT session online due to logistical constraints introduced challenges such as potential connectivity issues and reduced participant engagement. These factors could have impacted the richness of the discussion and the overall findings. Additionally, although efforts were made to ensure diversity and objectivity, the reliance on expert opinions inherently introduces a level of subjectivity. Nonetheless, the use of NGT proved effective in this study, offering a structured method for eliciting expert opinions and prioritizing strategies.

Reflecting on the methodology, the structured and systematic nature of NGT has shown to be a valuable tool for generating consensus and ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives. This approach is particularly advantageous in addressing complex educational challenges. Future research could benefit from employing a similar methodology, especially in investigating the implementation and impact of the proposed strategies across different educational settings. By maintaining a structured framework, NGT facilitates the identification and prioritization of key strategies, which can significantly contribute to improving instructional leadership practices. Such research would not only validate the current findings but also provide deeper insights into the practical application of these strategies, potentially leading to more refined and effective educational interventions.

To build upon these findings, several recommendations emerge for future research and practice. Ongoing studies should aim to validate and refine the proposed strategies within various Malaysian school settings, and potentially extend this research to other educational systems. Evaluating the practical implementation of these strategies and their effectiveness in real-world scenarios is essential, particularly when considering the unique challenges and opportunities present in different contexts. Expanding the sample size and diversity in future studies could enhance the generalizability of the findings, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies' impact. Additionally, integrating hybrid methodologies that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches may offer a more nuanced view of the strategies' feasibility and effectiveness. Longitudinal studies would be

particularly useful in assessing the long-term impact of the recommended strategies on school performance, while research into the barriers and facilitators of effective implementation could offer valuable insights into the practical challenges faced by schools. Moreover, exploring how these strategies interact with broader educational reforms and policies could yield critical insights into their integration and sustainability within the Malaysian educational system.

In conclusion, the study's findings, derived from expert input through the NGT process, present a solid foundation for enhancing school performance through instructional leadership in Malaysia. The strategies identified, such as understanding the educational context, setting clear goals, providing adequate resources, fostering professional development, and promoting collaborative communities, are both practical and actionable. Despite the acknowledged limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to the field of educational leadership. It lays out a clear pathway for future research and practice focused on improving school performance. The insights gained not only enrich academic discourse but also provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and educational practitioners committed to advancing school effectiveness and student outcomes.

Acknowledgment

This independent study, originating from thesis work at Universiti Malaya and conducted without external funding, underscores the institution's commitment to advancing research in educational leadership and school performance. The study employs the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) to develop expert-driven strategies aimed at enhancing school performance in Malaysia. It presents a practical framework that integrates a deep understanding of the Malaysian educational context, emphasizing the importance of goal setting, adequate resource provision, and the promotion of professional development. By focusing on these key areas, the research offers valuable insights for educational leaders and policymakers seeking to improve school performance through context-specific strategies.

Article Contribution to Related Field of Study

The application of NGT in this study underscores the value of structured expert consensus in creating practical and contextually appropriate recommendations. The findings provide important insights into effective instructional leadership, highlighting the importance of data-informed decision-making and the engagement of stakeholders. Furthermore, this research addresses critical challenges within the Malaysian educational system and paves the way for future studies to validate and refine these strategies in various contexts. This contributes to a broader understanding of how instructional leadership can be applied to improve school performance. By focusing on these objectives, the study not only enriches the academic discourse on educational leadership but also provides actionable insights for policymakers

and practitioners, emphasizing the need for evidence-based strategies in the pursuit of school excellence.

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