PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONG INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE SCHOOLS' MIDDLE YEAR PROGRAMME COORDINATORS: CONCEPTUALIZING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

Instructional leadership has over the decade advanced globally due to the influence of transformative, distributed, and pedagogical with other subsets of leadership. Nevertheless, it is considered a main contributor to improving teaching and learning. Contextually, this study aims to explore the instructional leadership of International Baccalaureate (IB) Programme Coordinators implementing the Middle Year Programme in selected IB international schools in Malaysia. A research framework investigating Middle Year Programme Coordinators' (MYPC) instructional leadership practices and challenges are proposed. Methodologically, it is reasoned that online interviews and focus group interviews with subordinate teachers will be appropriate for this study. To analyze the data collected, comparisons of the participant's responses will be made and common codes and themes were will be identified. The data generated from the interview will be analyzed by comparing the data of the respective respondents to identify common codes, themes and trends. Member checks will also be conducted giving respondents a chance not only to validate their interview transcripts and comment on the researcher's codes and emerging themes but also on the correctness of the inferences. Focus group data from the findings will highlight their conceptualizations, experiences and views of teachers on instructional leadership. To ensure limitations and biases are at the minimum since the sample size is small, data triangulation with the theoretical framework also will help to ensure that the study is guided by a clear purpose, seeking feedback from experts in the field and sharing the results with other researchers for further validation to reduce the impact of limitations and biases and increase the generalizability of the results.

Keywords: Practices, Challenges, Leadership Strategies, International Baccalaureate World Schools, Middle Year Programme Coordinators' (MYPC)

Introduction

There are several areas of school leadership, including transformative, distributed, situational and instructional leadership, and many other subsets of leadership (Tan et al., 2022; Zuze &

Juan, 2020). All of these areas of leadership in schools are necessary if schools are to be successful (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004). If schools are going to be successful, then leadership is required at every level (Goodman-Scott & Ziomek-Daigle, 2022; Heck & Reid, 2020). All these types of leadership can work together to create a positive and effective learning environment Together, these leadership styles can create a culture of shared leadership and collaboration, where everyone works together to support student success (Donley, et al., 2020).

According to Djafri et al. (2018), to achieve and sustain success, school leadership, in addition to having the responsibility of ensuring that teaching and learning are carried out effectively, must acknowledge and comprehend the function of instructional leadership.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the important role that instructional leaders play in supporting student learning and success. Instructional leaders are responsible for creating a supportive and effective learning environment for students, teachers, and staff. They are also responsible for setting the direction for the school and ensuring that its goals and priorities align with the needs and aspirations of its students, teachers, and community. Over the past decades, a huge number of both quantitative and qualitative research has been conducted on instructional leadership, with researchers inferring that these various studies reflect a variety of climates of learning in the school with school leadership support (Hallinger, 2011a, 2011b). Since, then, Instructional Leadership has seen an increase in its usage as the pressure and needs and expectations from schools and their endeavour to establish a more accountable school system (Abonyi & Sofo, 2019).

I. Need for Exploration in the knowledge base of IB Schools

Of late, many researchers agree that schools in the 21st century require that school leaders demonstrate instructional leadership skills and expertise (Paletta et al., 2020; Sindhvad et al., 2022; van Schaik et al., 2020). These researchers believe that this is because schools in the 21st century require students to demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement. Interestingly, the popularity of international schools in Malaysia has been steadily increasing over the last seven years. As a result, it is worthwhile to conduct in-depth research on the topic of instructional leadership practices at IB schools, which are among the numerous international schools, to enhance these IB schools and bring them up to the standards set by the IB organization (Cheng & Wu, 2020; Kocak & Ozdemir, 2020). As a result, the purpose of this research is to investigate the instructional leadership of IB Coordinators who are responsible

for the implementation of the Middle year curriculum at a selection of IB international schools in Malaysia. It will be of interest to anyone with a stake in the matter to hear how Middle Year Program Coordinators at IB global schools are supporting teaching and learning as they implement the program. This study will address the gap in the current research by exploring the experiences and perspectives of middle-level school leaders on instructional leadership. The findings from this study will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by instructional leaders in middle-level schools and thus will contribute to the ongoing conversation about the role of instructional leadership in supporting student learning and success.

Literature review for the theoretical and conceptual framework

Theories on Instructional leadership have often described it as a collaborative process between the principals and school communities to improve learning, and overall achieve school goals and missions (Hou et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021). As this study is concerning middle leadership levels, effective MYPCs will have to understand their roles and responsibilities to work closely with principals, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to identify challenges and develop solutions. However, instructional leadership also requires these middle leaders to take decisive action when necessary. This may mean making tough decisions about resource allocation or personnel changes (Hansen & Larusdottir, 2015). The MYPCs, are also tasked with the process of designing, implementing, and evaluating instructional programs and materials to meet the needs of students. The Path-Goal Theory developed by House (1971) was deemed to be the most appropriate option for the research project in terms of its theoretical underpinnings. This is due to the interaction that exists between leaders and their subordinates explicitly addressed by the Path-Goal Leadership Theory. Nevertheless, the path-goal theory of leadership is universal, and it is used in multidisciplinary studies, including educational settings. Figure 1 illustrates the concept of Path-Goal Theory.

Figure 1

*Model of Path-Goal Theory of Leadership (House, 1971)*
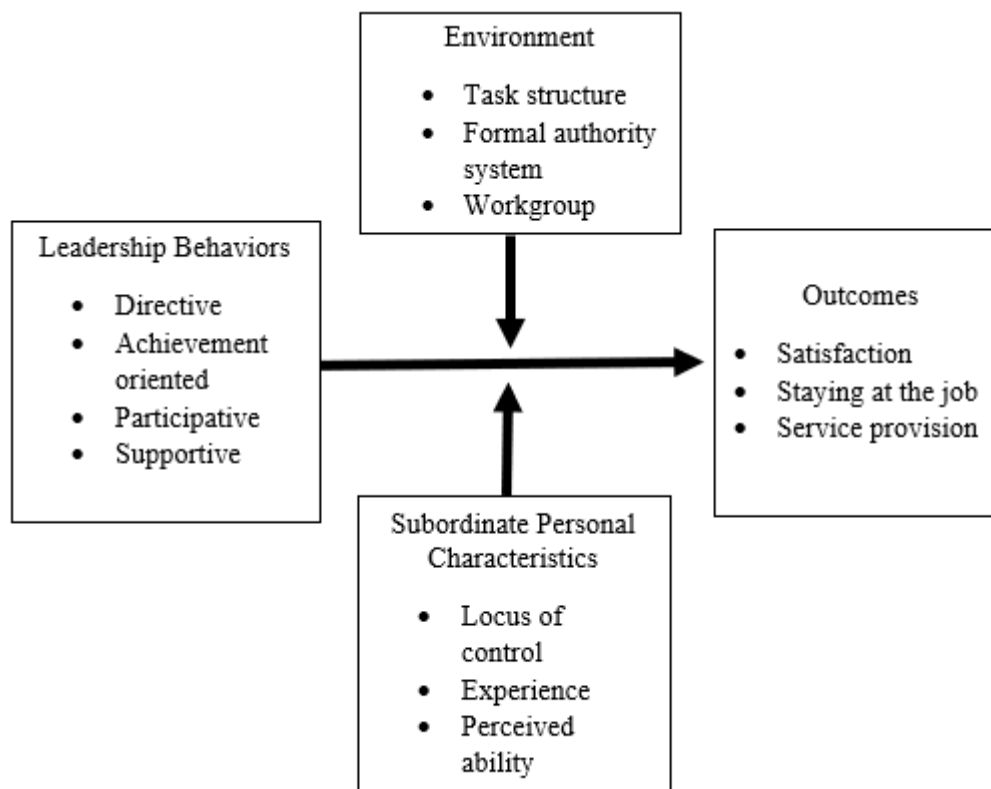
In this study, this theory is used to form the main structure as the theoretical framework to support the explanation of IB school settings and to subsequently examine how MYPCs (as instructional leaders) support their teachers towards the purpose and goal attainment of instructional leadership.

While the Path-goal theory is used in this study, the model of instructional leadership *(Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986a)* will be considered as a reference frame for a priori codes' meaning the codes that are developed before examining the current data. Figure 2 shows the model indicating the dimensions and sub-dimensions of instructional leadership.

Figure 2

Framework of Instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986a)
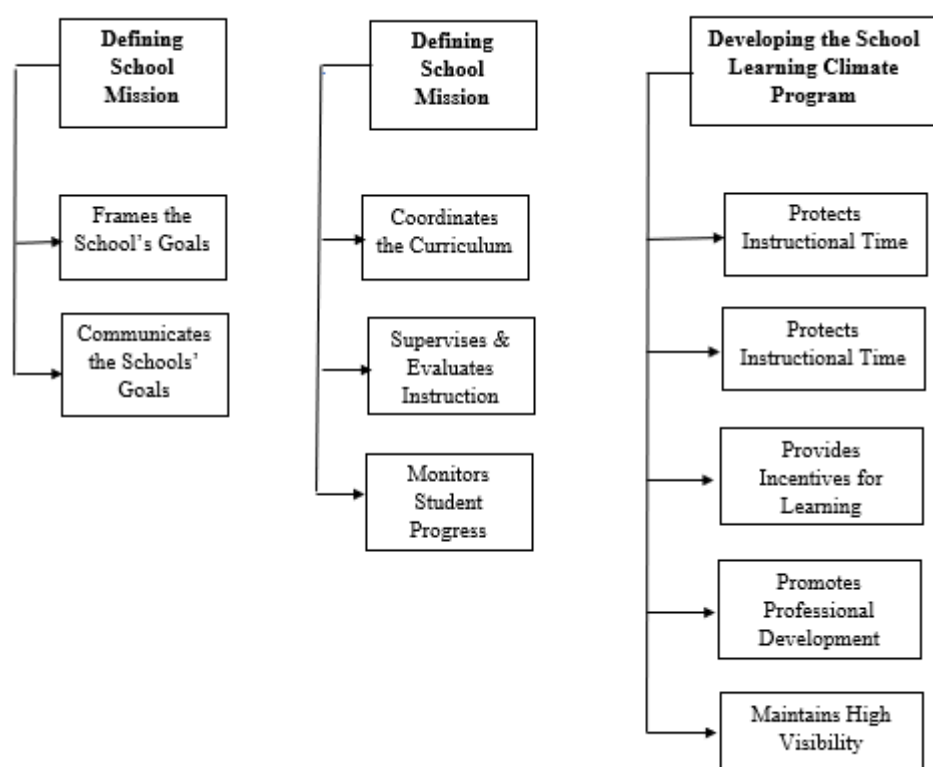
To explain further, the model indicates the usual dimensions to be explored when describing instructional leadership, such as:

(a) Defining school mission;

(b) Managing instructional program; and

(c) Developing the School Learning Climate Program.

A theoretical framework is regarded as an analytical tool that is used to examine phenomena in their totality (Montiel & Mokus, 2022). It provides a holistic view of a phenomenon, allowing scholars to see how different parts of the whole interact with each other. When relating to this study, theoretical frameworks provide means by which new knowledge can be generated about complex phenomena such as instructional leadership. They also help researchers to understand what is already known in the context of IB schools by providing a structure within which the researcher can organize his thoughts and findings back to the body of knowledge. In summary, theoretical frameworks serve as powerful tools for both researchers and practitioners in their efforts to improve educational practice (Charles-Britton et al., 2022; Timm et al., 2022).

Designing a Conceptual Framework

Figure 3 below shows the Conceptual framework as the result of the synthesis between the Path-goal theory (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986b) model of instructional leadership and the key research questions in this study. While the conceptual framework seems to suggest that the arrow is implying the investigations into relationships between variables, the utilization of this qualitative study will only highlight how the unit of analysis is linked together to produce a contextual understanding of the future intent. Hence, it will be carried out through a qualitative study that does not include hypotheses.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework for the study
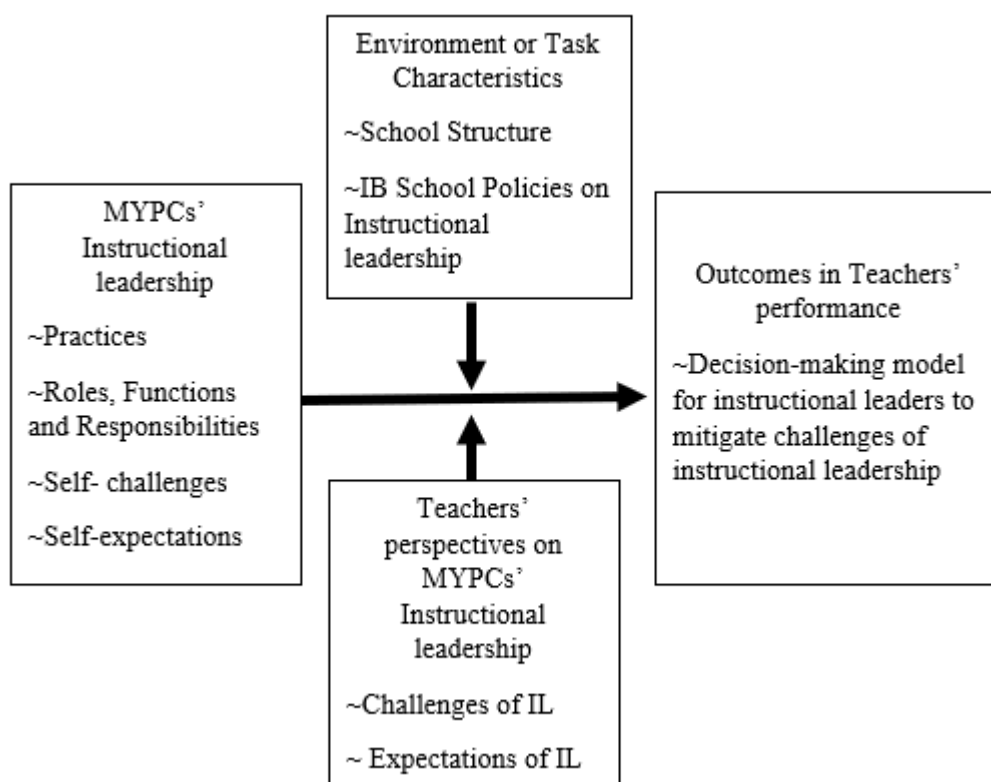
Earlier it was mentioned that the goal of instructional leadership is to ensure that all students have access to high-quality instruction that meets their individual needs (Hou et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2021). From literature reviews, it is widely known that the concepts of instructional leadership are constantly evolving as educators learn more about strategies to improve

teachers' performance (Amzat et al., 2022). In essence, the conceptual framework shows this study would investigate how MYPCs as instructional leaders can take proactive steps to:

(a) understand their practices of Instructional leadership,

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

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

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

However, the core principles remain the same for instructional leaders, such as school leaders must set the vision for the school, provide support and resources to teachers, create an environment that promotes collaboration and communication among teachers, and work with teachers to identify best practices and implement them in the classroom (Redecker, 2017). These are considered as the sidelines of findings according to the model of instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, 1986b). In addition, there is a need to investigate the challenges of MYPCs as instructional leaders (Shaked & Schechter, 2017). From literature reviews, the challenges associated with instructional leadership can be divided into two main categories: organizational challenges and personal challenges. Organizational challenges include things like resistance to change from stakeholders or lack of resources (Pettigrew et al., 2001). Personal challenges might include feelings of isolation or doubt about one's abilities. For the MYPCs and teachers, overcoming these challenges starts with acknowledging the realities that are present in their IB context (Shaked & Schechter, 2017). For organizational challenges, this might involve building buy-in from key stakeholders or finding creative ways to stretch limited resources. For personal challenges, it might mean seeking out supportive relationships or professional development opportunities (Dickson et al., 2020b). Whatever the challenge, there is no single solution. It is hoped that once this study has identified the challenges that the people and organization are facing, they can begin to develop strategies for addressing them through better decision-making (Culver et al., 2021).

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

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

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

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

As summarized according to Figure 3 above, the proposed conceptual framework for this study provides a guide for understanding, designing, and conducting research. It includes the key areas and propositions that define and explain MYPCs practices, challenges and strategies of instructional leadership in the context of their IB schools.

II. Need for Research in IB Schools

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

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

III. Need for Research Framework in IB Schools

**Selecting Context and Participants for the study**

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

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

Data Collection Process

For data collection, interviews with participants in the study will be carried out. In qualitative research, interviews are known as a common data collection method used in qualitative research (McLellan et al., 2003). Interviews allow researchers to ask questions and probe for a

deeper understanding than what might be possible through observation alone. However, interviews can be biased if not conducted properly, and they often require more time and resources than other methods such as focus groups or document analysis (Prior, 2018). In addition, conducting online interviews is an appropriate way to collect in-depth information from individuals about their experiences and opinions, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in the Movement Control Order in Malaysia. Secondly, the researcher intends to conduct focus group interviews to triangulate from teachers' perspectives (Rabiee, 2004). This type of data collection can provide rich insights into people's thoughts and opinions on a given topic. However, focus groups can be expensive and time-consuming to organize, and they may not produce representative results if the group dynamics are not carefully managed. As a process, it involves bringing a group of teachers together to discuss the practices, challenges and better suggestions for instructional leadership in their schools. This can be a great way to generate ideas and get feedback on specific issues (Orvik et al., 2013). The responses of the participants will only be audio-recorded and not video-recorded due to the school's policy and the participants' consent. Finally, the audio will be transcribed for further analysis with ATLAS. ti software. Once the researcher has decided on a method of analysis and is familiar with the basic and relevant functions of the software, the researcher will start coding the data according to certain themes or categories (Denecke & Nejdl, 2009; Schwartz & Ungar, 2015). This is ultimately done by assigning codes to specific passages or segments of text within their dataset. As a methodological illustration, Figure 4 provides the process flowchart as a reference guide.
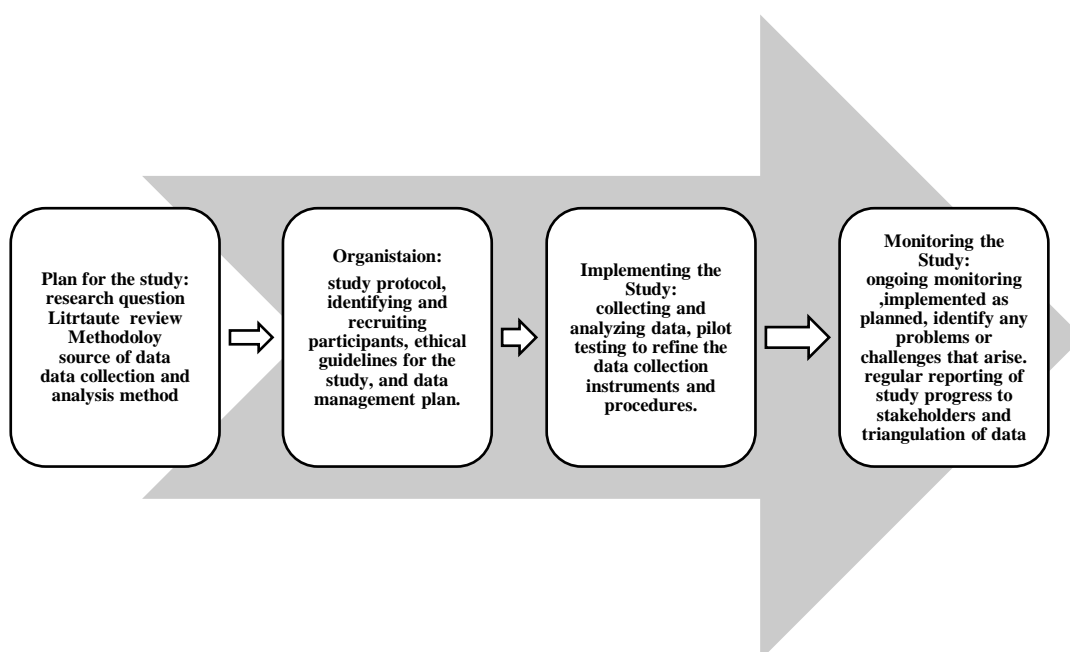
Proposed Research Framework

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

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

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

Implementing the Study: This element of the framework involves collecting and analyzing data, using a variety of methods such as interviews, surveys, observations, and document reviews. It may also include the use of pilot testing to refine the data collection instruments and procedures.

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

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

Conclusion

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

As argued, the research framework in International Baccalaureate (IB) schools is an important field of study that has not received enough attention. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the methods used by the instructional leaders at three Peninsular Malaysian private schools that are part of the International Baccalaureate programme. Purposive sampling, in-depth focus interviews, and focus group interviews will be used to collect information from four instructors at each school. The study's overarching goals are to frame a focused research topic, pick an acceptable case study methodology, locate relevant data sources, and establish procedures for collecting and analysing the data. The team also plans to create an ethical framework for the research, a data management strategy, and a complete study protocol.

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

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