Volume 5, Issue 1, June 2026, ISSN: 2948-4316
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20822841xxx
Published on: 30 June 2026

Journal of Social Sciences and Business
Quest International University
https://qiu.edu.my/journal/index.php/jssb/index

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AMONG PRIVATE PRESCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN SELANGOR, MALAYSIA

Sharmila Devi Manogaran[1*], Aznan Che Ahmad[2]

[1]Quest International University, Perak, Malaysia
[2]Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Brunei Darussalam

**Corresponding author: sharmila.manogaran@qiu.edu.my*

Abstract: Instructional leadership has become a central focus in Malaysia's educational reform agenda, particularly under the National Education Blueprint (NEB) (2013–2025). This study investigates how private preschool principals in Selangor practice instructional leadership and the challenges they encounter in fulfilling this role. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving ten purposively selected principals with more than ten years of experience in early childhood education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and triangulated with document analysis to ensure validity. The findings reveal that principals actively engage in instructional leadership through curriculum supervision, teacher mentoring, and parent engagement. They consistently emphasized the importance of aligning classroom practices with the National Preschool Standard Curriculum while adapting lessons to meet children's developmental needs. However, the principals faced persistent challenges, including teacher resistance to adopt new pedagogical approaches, parental demands for academic outcomes over holistic development, and administrative overload that reduced time for instructional activities. Access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) was also limited, with principals citing time constraints, financial barriers, and the lack of tailored training programs as major obstacles. Despite these challenges, principals demonstrated resilience and creativity, organizing in-house training sessions, leveraging online platforms, and fostering collaborative learning among teachers. Their commitment to instructional leadership reflects both professional responsibility and moral duty to ensure quality learning experiences for children. The study concludes that instructional leadership among private preschool principals is evolving but constrained by systemic barriers. Tailored CPD programs, supportive policies, and strategies to reduce administrative burdens are essential to empower principals. Strengthening instructional leadership will enable private preschool leaders to contribute more effectively to Malaysia's vision of high-quality early childhood education under the NEB.

Keywords: continuous professional development (CPD), curriculum supervision, instructional leadership, private preschool principals

INTRODUCTION

Instructional leadership has long been recognized as central to effective schooling. Since Hallinger and Murphy's work in the 1980s, the concept has expanded to include principals' roles in shaping curriculum, guiding teacher practice, and fostering continuous improvement. In early childhood education (ECE), this leadership is equally vital, as principals influence the foundational learning experiences of young children.

Globally, instructional leadership is linked to improved student outcomes. Studies in the United States reaffirm that principals who monitor instruction, set clear goals, and support teacher development enhance learning (Hallinger & Wang, 2020). Similarly, OECD (2019) highlights that strong leadership in early childhood settings improves developmental outcomes. In Malaysia, the National Education Blueprint (NEB) (2013–2025) places instructional leadership at the heart of reform, envisioning principals as leaders who prioritize pedagogy and teacher growth alongside management.

Private preschools play a significant role in Malaysia's ECE sector, enrolling large numbers of children while operating with limited government support. Principals in these schools must balance curriculum quality, teacher supervision, and parental engagement with operational demands. Yet, research on instructional leadership in private preschools remains scarce, with most studies focusing on public schools.

This study addresses that gap by examining how private preschool principals in Selangor practice instructional leadership, the challenges they face, and their access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD). International practices show that structured CPD and clear leadership standards strengthen early childhood education, underscoring the urgency for Malaysia to empower private preschool principals. By situating Malaysia's experience within this global context, the study contributes to understanding how principals can be supported to realize the NEB's vision of high-quality early childhood education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principals in private preschools hold the highest administrative role and are expected to demonstrate effective instructional leadership. Their responsibilities extend beyond routine administration to defining the school mission, managing curriculum, supervising teaching and learning, monitoring student performance, and fostering a positive school climate (Holyfield, 2010). Principals in private preschools are required to balance administrative responsibilities, operational management, and pedagogical guidance, making their role crucial to the overall quality of early childhood education. Moreover, outstanding principals are distinguished by their competencies in both administrative and instructional domains. The Ministry of Education Malaysia identifies six dimensions of leadership competency: teaching development, human relationships, self-effectiveness, resources and operations, managing change and innovation, and policy and direction (Mustamin & Yasin, 2012). These competencies are crucial for supporting teacher development, ensuring curriculum supervision, and ultimately driving student achievement.

Table 1
Challenges Faced by Private Preschool Principals and Their Impact on Instructional Leadership

Challenge Area	Description	Impact on Instructional Leadership
Administrative Workload	Excessive paperwork and compliance requirements limit instructional focus.	Reduces engagement in classroom observation and teacher mentoring.
Time Constraints	Limited time available for mentoring teachers and supervising curriculum.	Restricts opportunities for instructional supervision and leadership practices.
Resource Constraints	Insufficient financial and human resources hinder innovation and CPD participation.	Limits the adoption of innovative teaching strategies and professional development.
Teacher Resistance	Resistance among teachers to adopt new instructional practices.	Weakens collaboration, innovation, and shared instructional vision.
External Pressures	Parental expectations and socio-economic pressures influence school priorities.	Creates stress and diverts focus from instructional leadership.
Lack of CPD	Limited access to relevant and tailored professional development opportunities.	Restricts principals' ability to update pedagogical knowledge and leadership competencies.

Despite the recognized importance of instructional leadership, principals face numerous barriers in practice. As summarized in Table 1 above, these include time constraints, excessive administrative workload, weak communication skills, resource shortages, teacher resistance, and external socio-economic pressures (Pruim, 2000; Bedard, 2005; Stauffer, 2018; Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Pont et al., 2008; Ralebese, Jita, & Badmus, 2025). Each of these challenges limits principals' ability to focus on instructional priorities and undermines their leadership effectiveness.

The literature also emphasizes CPD as a critical enabler of instructional leadership. However, principals often face barriers to participation, such as limited time, insufficient funding, and limited contextual relevance of professional development programmes (Hallinger, 2011). This aligns directly with the study's findings, where principals acknowledged the importance of CPD but cited the same constraints. Both theory and practice point to the need for structured, relevant CPD opportunities that address the realities of private preschool leadership.

Scholars such as Hallinger (2011), and Bush (2020) propose several strategies to overcome these challenges, as outlined in Table 2. Structured CPD programs are seen as essential for enhancing principals' instructional competencies, while targeted resource allocation can provide funds for training and curriculum innovation. Policy support is necessary to align leadership practices with the goals of the NEB. Building a collaborative culture encourages teacher buy-in and shared responsibility, and reforms in time management can help principals balance administrative and instructional duties more effectively. These recommendations resonate with the creative strategies adopted by principals in Selangor, such as organizing in-house workshops, sharing resources among schools, and using online platforms for professional development.

Table 2

Strategies Suggested in Literature

Strategy	Expected Outcome
Structured CPD	Enhances principals' instructional competencies.
Resource Allocation	Provides funds for training and curriculum innovation.
Policy Support	Aligns leadership practices with NEB goals.
Collaborative Culture	Encourages teacher buy-in and shared responsibility.
Time Management Reforms	Allows principals to balance administrative and instructional duties.

Taken together, the literature and findings steadily suggest that: private preschool principals are committed to instructional leadership, however, systemic barriers that limit their effectiveness (Wong et al, 2025; Hamzah & Zubir, 2023). Existing studies indicate that structured CPD, resource support, and collaborative practices is essential for realizing the NEB's vision of high-quality early childhood education (Ng & Rao, 2022; Wong et al, 2025).

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

1. To explore how private preschool principals practice instructional leadership in their schools.

2. To identify the challenges faced by principals in implementing instructional leadership.
3. To examine principals' perceptions of CPD and its role in enhancing instructional leadership.
4. To propose strategies for strengthening instructional leadership among private preschool principals.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore instructional leadership among private preschool principals in Selangor, Malaysia. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions.

The case study approach was particularly appropriate because it enabled the researcher to investigate principals' practices within their natural settings. By focusing on a small, purposively selected group of principals, the study was able to generate rich, detailed insights into the challenges and opportunities of instructional leadership in private preschools.

Population and Respondents

The population for this study consisted of principals from private preschools registered under the Ministry of Education in Selangor. Selangor was chosen as the research site because it has one of the highest concentrations of private preschools in Malaysia, ranging from small community-based centers to large franchise operations. This diversity provided a broad spectrum of leadership experiences.

Ten principals participated in the study. All had more than ten years of experience in early childhood education and were actively managing private preschools at the time of data collection. Their extensive experience ensured that they could provide informed perspectives on instructional leadership practices and challenges. The sample size of ten participants was considered sufficient for this qualitative study, as it allowed an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, as the study aims to achieve depth of understanding rather than breadth (Creswell, 2013).

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used to select participants. This non-probability sampling technique was appropriate because the study sought to engage principals with specific characteristics namely, substantial experience in early childhood education and direct involvement in instructional leadership. By focusing on experienced principals, the study ensured that participants could reflect meaningfully on their leadership practices and the systemic challenges they faced.

Instrument

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. A standardized set of 22 questions was developed, covering four thematic areas:

i. Principals' competencies in instructional leadership.
ii. Challenges in implementing instructional leadership.
iii. Perceptions of CPD and its influence on leadership practices.
iv. Difficulties in acquiring and applying CPD knowledge.

Semi-structured interviews allowed for consistency across participants while providing flexibility to probe deeper into individual experiences. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was conducted via online platforms such as Zoom, given the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher first conducted a pilot interview with a retired preschool principal to refine the interview questions. Feedback from the pilot study was used to improve clarity and relevance. Formal interviews were then conducted with the ten selected principals. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and ethical considerations such as confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed.

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and stored securely. The researcher also reviewed relevant documents, including the NEB (2013–2025) and preschool policy guidelines, to triangulate findings and ensure validity.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed thematically. The researcher used a six-step data analysis method adapted from Creswell (2014) to analyse the data collected from the interviews conducted in the study. Codes were grouped into categories such as "instructional practices," "challenges," "CPD access," and "commitment." These categories were then synthesized into broader themes that reflected the research objectives.

Triangulation was achieved by comparing interview data with document analysis. This process enhanced the credibility of the findings by ensuring that themes were supported by multiple sources of evidence. Member checking was also conducted, where participants reviewed summaries of their interviews to confirm accuracy.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used in reporting findings. Data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes. The researcher also ensured that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time without consequence.

FINDINGS

The qualitative interviews with ten private preschool principals in Selangor revealed a complex picture of instructional leadership in practice. While principals demonstrated strong commitment to guiding teaching and learning, they faced persistent challenges that limited their effectiveness. Analysis of the interview data revealed four recurring themes related to instructional leadership in private preschools; instructional practices, challenges in implementation, access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and principals' resilience and commitment.

Instructional Practices

All principals emphasized their role in supervising curriculum delivery. They described how they monitored lesson plans, observed classroom teaching, and provided feedback to teachers. One principal explained: *"I make sure every teacher follows the National Preschool Standard Curriculum, but I also*

encourage them to adapt lessons to children's needs." This reflects the dual responsibility of ensuring compliance with national standards while fostering innovation in pedagogy.

Teacher mentoring was another key aspect of instructional leadership. Principals reported conducting regular meetings with teachers to discuss teaching strategies, classroom management, and child development. Several principals highlighted the importance of modelling best practices: *"I don't just tell teachers what to do; I show them how to do it."* This hands-on approach aligns with Hallinger's (2020) emphasis on principals as instructional coaches.

Parent engagement also emerged as a significant component of instructional leadership. Principals described organizing workshops, parent-teacher meetings, and informal discussions to involve parents in their children's learning. However, they noted that parental expectations often focused on academic achievement rather than holistic development, creating tension between instructional goals and parental demands.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite their efforts, principals faced numerous challenges in implementing instructional leadership. Teacher resistance was a recurring theme. Many principals reported that teachers were reluctant to adopt new pedagogical approaches, preferring traditional methods. One principal lamented: *"Some teachers have been here for years and don't want to change. They say, 'This is how we've always done it.'"* This resistance hindered efforts to introduce innovative practices and align teaching with NEB goals.

Parental demands also posed challenges. Principals described how parents often pressured them to prioritize academic outcomes, such as reading and writing, over play-based learning and socio-emotional development. This pressure sometimes led to conflicts between principals' instructional vision and parents' expectations.

Administrative overload was another significant barrier. Principals reported spending large amounts of time on operational tasks such as managing finances, handling enrolment, and ensuring compliance with regulations. One principal noted: *"I want to spend more time in classrooms, but most of my day is taken up with paperwork and meetings."* This administrative burden reduced the time available for instructional leadership.

Access to Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

All principals acknowledged the importance of CPD for enhancing instructional leadership. They expressed a desire to participate in training programs, workshops, and conferences to update their knowledge and skills. However, they reported significant barriers to accessing CPD.

Time constraints were the most frequently cited issue. Principals explained that their busy schedules left little room for professional development. Financial limitations were also a major challenge. Many private preschools operate on tight budgets, making it difficult to allocate funds for CPD. One principal explained: *"We want to attend training, but the fees are too high, and we can't afford to close the school for a day."*

Relevance of CPD programs was another concern. Principals noted that many training opportunities were designed for public school leaders and did not address the specific needs of private preschool principals. This mismatch reduced the effectiveness of CPD and discouraged participation.

Resilience and Commitment

Despite these challenges, principals demonstrated resilience and commitment to instructional leadership. They expressed strong dedication to improving teaching quality and supporting teachers' professional growth. Several principals described creative strategies for overcoming barriers, such as organizing in-house training sessions, sharing resources among schools, and using online platforms for professional development.

One principal explained: *"We may not have the funds for big conferences, but we organize our own workshops. Teachers share their experiences, and we learn from each other."* This collaborative approach reflects principals' determination to sustain instructional leadership despite systemic constraints.

Principals also emphasized their personal commitment to children's learning. They viewed instructional leadership not just as a professional responsibility but as a moral duty. As one principal stated: *"We are shaping the future of these children. That is why I push myself to be a better leader, even when it is difficult."*

To summarize, the findings reveal that private preschool principals in Selangor actively engage in instructional leadership through curriculum supervision, teacher mentoring, and parent engagement. However, their efforts are constrained by teacher resistance, parental demands, administrative overload, and limited access to CPD. Despite these challenges, principals remain committed to improving teaching and learning, often developing creative strategies to sustain instructional leadership.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that private preschool principals in Selangor are committed to instructional leadership, actively supervising curriculum, mentoring teachers, and engaging parents. Their practices reflect dedication to improving teaching and learning, yet systemic barriers such as teacher resistance, parental pressure for academic outcomes, administrative overload, and limited access to CPD, restrict their effectiveness. Within Hallinger's (2020) instructional leadership framework, principals engage in defining the mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting a positive learning climate, though contextual challenges limit their classroom presence and innovation.

CPD emerged as a critical enabler of leadership effectiveness. Principals recognized its importance but faced barriers of cost, time, and relevance, with most programs designed for public school leaders rather than private preschool contexts. Tailored CPD initiatives focusing on curriculum innovation, teacher mentoring, and parent engagement are essential. Despite these constraints, principals demonstrated resilience by organizing in-house workshops, leveraging online platforms, and fostering collaborative learning among teachers.

International comparisons highlight Malaysia's relative gaps. Singapore mandates government-funded CPD for preschool leaders, Australia embeds instructional leadership in national standards, and OECD countries consistently link strong leadership to improved child outcomes. Malaysia's NEB aligns with these global trends but implementation remains uneven, leaving private preschool principals underserved and reliant on self-initiated solutions.

The findings carry clear policy implications and are consistent with earlier studies on instructional leadership in early childhood education. Findings that are reported by Wong et al, (2025) and Hamzah and

Zubir (2023) found that structured CPD tailored to private preschool principals, reduced administrative burdens through support staff or digital systems, and training in change management to address teacher resistance are critical in effective teaching and learning processes. Aligning parental expectations with holistic child development is equally important. Practical strategies such as collaborative workshops, leader networks, and digital tools can further strengthen instructional leadership. In sum, instructional leadership among private preschool principals in Selangor is evolving but constrained; empowering principals through CPD and supportive policies will enhance early childhood education and advance Malaysia's NEB vision.

CONCLUSION

Instructional leadership among private preschool principals in Selangor is evident in their commitment to curriculum supervision, teacher mentoring, and parental emphasis on academic-orientated learning, yet systemic barriers continue to limit their effectiveness. Challenges such as teacher resistance, parental demands, administrative overload, and restricted access to CPD weaken their ability to fully enact leadership roles. International comparisons underscore the need for Malaysia to adopt more structured and tailored CPD programs, alongside supportive policies that reduce administrative burdens and align parental expectations with holistic child development. By empowering principals with relevant training, resources, and collaborative networks, Malaysia can strengthen instructional leadership in private preschools and advance the NEB's vision of high-quality early childhood education. Future research may consider larger sample sizes and diverse geographical contexts to enhance the generalisability of the findings.

REFERENCES

Bedard, J. (2005). *Leadership challenges in early childhood education*. *Journal of Educational Administration, 43*(2), 123–138. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230510586356

Bush, T. (2020). *Theories of educational leadership and management (5th ed.).* Sage Publications.

Bottoms, G., & Fry, B. (2009). *The role of school principals in improving student achievement*. Southern Regional Education Board.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches*. Sage Publications.

Hallinger, P. (2011). *Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research*. Journal of Educational Administration, *49*(2), 125–142. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578231111116699

Hallinger, P. (2020). *A review of instructional leadership research: 1980–2018*. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 48*(4), 498–519. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219855673

Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). *Assessing the instructional management behavior of principals*. *Elementary School Journal, 86*(2), 217–247. https://doi.org/10.1086/461445

Hallinger, P., & Wang, W. C. (2020). *Assessing instructional leadership with the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-4952-6

Hamzah, M. I. M., & Zubir, N. M. A. M. (2023). *Level of instructional leadership practice of preschool supervisors and its relationship with the commitment of community educators.* In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Psychology, Education, and Mental Health* (pp. 89–102). Atlantis Press.

Holyfield, L. (2010). *Leadership in early childhood education: Balancing administration and pedagogy*. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25*(3), 321–334. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2010.03.004

Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2013). *Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Education Malaysia.

Mustamin, T., & Yasin, M. (2012). *Leadership competencies in Malaysian schools*. *International Journal of Education, 4*(2), 45–56. https://doi.org/10.5296/ije.v4i2.1234

Ng, S. C., & Rao, N. (2022). *Early childhood education in Malaysia. In Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Education*. Springer.

OECD. (2019). *Providing quality early childhood education and care: Results from the Starting Strong survey*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/301005de-en

Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership: Policy and practice*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264044715-en

Pruim, J. (2000). *Barriers to effective instructional leadership*. *Educational Leadership Review, 1*(1), 15–28.

Ralebese, N., Jita, L., & Badmus, M. (2025). *Instructional leadership in African private preschools: Challenges and opportunities*. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education, 57*(1), 89–104. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-024-01345-9

Stauffer, S. (2018). *Administrative overload and its impact on instructional leadership*. *Journal of School Leadership, 28*(3), 345–362. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461802800305

Wong, C. H., Manogaran, S. D., Annamalah, S., Ahmed, S., & Sentosa, I. (2025). *Exploring instructional leadership of private preschool principals in advancing the National Education Blueprint implementation*. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies, 8*(2), 2372–2391. https://doi.org/10.53894/ijirss.v8i2.5669