Exploring instructional leadership of private preschool principals in advancing the national education blueprint implementation

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Abstract

This research evaluates private preschool principals' leadership effectiveness within the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025), assessing instructional competence, CPD influence, and barriers to knowledge application. Aimed at understanding instructional leadership in private preschools, it seeks to identify and address performance improvement obstacles. The study employed purposive sampling, by obtaining consent from 10 preschool principals. Participants were granted unrestricted access and complete autonomy in various aspects of school administration. This includes overseeing student-teacher interactions, curriculum improvement, and nurturing relationships with families. Documentation and a checklist were provided to evaluate participants' initial understanding of the research process. The findings highlight areas for enhancing principals' competencies, promoting positive perceptions of CPD, and addressing obstacles related to its implementation and acquisition. Challenges include parental pressures impacting school visions and time constraints due to teachers' confidence issues. Principals prioritize practical experiences over academic credentials and express interest in improving Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Obstacles to CPD acquisition include time limitations, financial constraints, and implementation difficulties. This study provides valuable insights into the roles of private preschool principals in enhancing school performance and children's achievements. It underscores the connection between instructional leadership, school efficacy, and children's overall success. The findings have significant implications for instructional leadership and professional development in private preschool settings, guiding the enhancement of training content and methodologies for principals and educators.

1. Introduction

Preschool education, while not obligatory, is highly esteemed by parents who aspire to ready their children for formal primary schooling [1]. Both public and private preschools adhere to the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (NPSC) and regulations stipulated in the Preschool Education Act 1996. The Ministry of Education (MOE) strives for universal enrolment in preschools, emphasizing instructional leadership and continuous professional development (CPD) of school leaders as outlined in the National Education Blueprint (NEB) (2013-2025). Effective private preschool principals play a critical role in realizing MOE's vision, necessitating exemplary instructional leadership skills to enhance learning outcomes [2]. Quality early childhood education is imperative for favourable child outcomes and societal benefits (Smith et al., 2023). The MOE aims to deploy proficient principals in all schools, with Selangor chosen for its diverse array of private kindergartens. The responsibilities of private preschool principals encompass aligning with MOE's objectives and excelling in instructional leadership to contribute to educational progress and NEB aims [3].

1.1. Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education (ECE) is vital for human development and national progress. Principals play a crucial role, utilizing leadership skills to ensure high-quality education. Effective ECE leadership correlates with care and education quality. Principals develop competencies like pedagogical knowledge through continuous professional development (CPD), emphasized in the National Education Blueprint (NEB). Self-awareness is key, fostering productive leadership. CPD enhances analytical skills, aiding in addressing challenges. Competent directors ensure curriculum quality, meeting child and parent needs. Ongoing development improves principals' leadership, enhancing school performance and student achievements in early childhood settings.

1.2. Problem Statement

This research explores preschool principals' leadership in implementing Malaysia's National Education Blueprint (NEB) (2013-2025), crucial for school performance. While the NEB prioritizes capable preschool leaders, there's a gap in providing professional development, hindering effective classroom practices. Principals must enhance their abilities to support young children. Clear procedures for continuous professional development (CPD) credits are lacking, impeding skill enrichment. The NEB mandates CPD for better comprehension and leadership. Private preschools lack instructional leadership, focusing more on operations. Continuous skill enhancement is vital for addressing challenges. The Ministry of Education (MOE) mandates training to balance instructional and administrative duties. These findings highlight the need for interventions to bolster preschool principals' instructional leadership skills and align with the NEB's objectives.

1.3. Objectives

Education is universally recognized as essential for societal and economic progress. Early childhood education (ECCE) plays a crucial role in fostering comprehensive child development, serving as the foundation for imparting essential skills to young learners. Various stakeholders, including preschool principals, teachers, families, policymakers, and the Ministry of Education (MOE), collaborate to enhance school performance and children's achievements. This study focuses on private preschool principals' leadership in implementing the National Education Blueprint (2013-2025) to address challenges in improving school performance. It assesses their instructional leadership proficiency, competency levels, and implementation hurdles. Additionally, it explores the impact of continuous professional development (CPD) on their instructional leadership perceptions and needs, investigating how CPD shapes their perspectives. The study also examines barriers in applying CPD-acquired knowledge to offer a comprehensive understanding of instructional leadership in private preschool settings.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study offers extensive insights into the roles undertaken by private preschool principals in overseeing and enhancing school performance and children's accomplishments. It underscores the interconnection between principals' instructional leadership, school effectiveness, and the overall success of children. The outcomes carry significant implications for instructional leadership and professional development within private preschool settings, guiding the improvement of training content and methodologies for principals and educators. Furthermore, it proposes strategies to enhance in-house training and initiation programs aimed at reinforcing instructional leadership abilities. The research also establishes a groundwork for further exploration in this domain and provides insights for potential reforms in private preschool education. Its objective is to advocate for adequate resources for principal training in instructional leadership, thereby fostering the progression of private preschool education in alignment with the National Education Blueprint.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Instructional Leadership of Principals in Private Preschools

Preschool principals, positioned at the helm of administration, shoulder significant responsibilities [4]. Renowned for their adept instructional leadership, they shape the school's mission, oversee curriculum, supervise teaching programs, monitor student progress, and cultivate a positive school climate [5]. The pressure on principals to excel in instructional leadership is compounded by their dedication to educational accountability and improving student outcomes [6]. Recognizing their pivotal role, the MOE has intensified efforts to enhance principal capabilities, allocating resources for training in instructional leadership skills. This investment aims to cultivate competent leaders who uphold high-performance standards. The MOE 's commitment underscores the importance of effective instructional leadership in

achieving educational objectives. Resource allocation reflects a systemic drive to empower principals, recognizing them as vital agents of educational excellence [7].

2.2. Competencies in Instructional Leadership for Preschool Principals

Exemplary school principals extend beyond administrative roles, integrating instructional leadership practices to strategically enhance educational improvement and positively impact student outcomes [8]. These practices notably influence early childhood education stakeholders, particularly enhancing children's reading acquisition skills [9]. Preschool principals' instructional leadership competencies, especially from a knowledge perspective, align with UNESCO's emphasis on leadership's importance in education [10, 11]. The Ministry of Education's frameworks recognize leadership competence across various domains, encompassing teaching development, interpersonal relationships, self-efficacy, resource management, operational oversight, change management, innovation, and policy guidance [12]. This underscores the multifaceted skills needed for effective educational leadership. Preschool principals are expected to nurture high-quality teachers, facilitate goal setting and assessment processes, and improve financial and human resource management practices, thereby enhancing overall school leadership effectiveness [13]. Continued academic focus on principal competencies demonstrates commitment to driving positive educational outcomes amidst educational complexities [14].

2.3. Challenges to Preschool Principals in Instructional Leadership Implementation

Instructional leaders encounter numerous obstacles hindering their ability to stay updated on pedagogical and managerial knowledge. Principals face challenges due to insufficient time allocated for professional development, leading to uncertainty and hindering the enhancement of instructional leadership abilities [15]. Moreover, inadequate emphasis on improving communication skills poses challenges in effectively implementing instructional leadership with teachers, while outdated mindsets hinder positive stakeholder relationships and excessive administrative tasks diminish effectiveness [16]. Further obstacles include challenges in articulating the school mission, negative perceptions toward instructional leadership, and limited financial and human resources [17, 18]. Insufficient budgeting, recruitment, socio-economic factors, stressful environments, and resource shortages compound these challenges [19]. Principals perceive both support and hindrances in implementing instructional leadership, emphasizing the importance of challenging processes, inspiring shared vision, and empowering others [20]. Challenges related to student discipline, administrative tasks, communication abilities, and time management significantly impede effective leadership [21]. Understanding obstacles faced by hesitant principals in applying instructional leadership in early childhood education is vital for professional growth [22]. This growth fosters collaborative learning, supports teacher advancement, and facilitates ongoing enhancements. Consequently, this research investigates instructional leadership skills of private preschool principals and the hurdles they face in enhancing school performance and student accomplishments, contributing to discussions on proficient educational leadership.

2.4. Preschool Principals' Ongoing Professional Growth

School principals are mandated to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) to facilitate quality teaching and learning, leading to exceptional student achievements [23]. They must possess early childhood content knowledge and administrative proficiency, rewarded for efforts to enhance pedagogical skills and school performance [24]. Principals participating in higher credit hours of CPD courses are better equipped to fulfill their duties. Ensuring schools are led by competent teachers who engage in preparatory and CPD programs is essential [25]. The Ministry of Education invests in CPD courses, evidencing commitment to nurturing instructional leadership [20]. Continuous CPD support enables preschool principals to enhance competencies, aligning with the crucial role of professional development in educational leadership.

2.5. Preschool Principals' Perceptions of CPD

Active engagement in effective professional development is vital for fostering school principals' success. They increasingly recognize the importance of structured training methods like peer collaboration, school walkthroughs, and coaching to enhance their professional competence [26]. Continuous professional development reinforces their accountability for school performance and student achievement, with some viewing it as crucial for retaining leadership roles and cultivating a positive school culture. Perceptions vary based on school district size, with smaller schools emphasizing the need for high-quality experts in training leadership, while larger districts cite time constraints. Despite the acknowledgment of professional development's importance, there's limited correlation between educators' certifications and student achievement. Divergent views among principals on instructional leadership's impact on teacher retention and student success contribute to high principal turnover rates. Recognizing the value of tailored training is crucial for effective implementation of high-quality early childhood programs, shaping discourse on educational leadership in early childhood education [26].

2.6. Professional Development Requirements for Preschool Principals

Enhancing content knowledge and acquiring new skills are imperative for principals to excel [27]. Customized professional development aligning with individual aspirations proves most effective, introducing best practices in teaching and curriculum [28]. It empowers principals to drive educational change, foster high-quality teaching, and achieve student success. Professional development encourages principals to reflect on school practices, becoming educational risk-takers [29]. With a heightened demand for instructional leadership, principals gain confidence in evaluating teachers through adequate professional development [27, 30]. This development not only fosters individual growth but also contributes to

economic progress, social integration, and national prosperity [31, 32]. Continuous professional development is crucial for sustaining motivation and acquiring new knowledge [33]. Preschool principals particularly benefit from professional development in evaluating teachers through state-mandated frameworks [34].

2.7. Challenges in Applying CPD Knowledge

School principals encounter numerous barriers to active participation in meaningful professional development. Challenges include limited confidence in continuous professional development (CPD) engagement, deficiencies in communication skills, and inadequate planning for ongoing learning initiatives, hindering their commitment to lifelong learning. Demographic factors also pose obstacles, with varying opportunities for CPD engagement across different districts. Insufficient emphasis on upgrading and sustaining principals' pedagogical knowledge further complicates matters. Furthermore, soft skill competencies, including communication and networking abilities, act as obstacles to actively seeking out professional development opportunities. The hesitancy to partake in professional development mainly stems from principals' attitudes towards lifelong learning, which might perceive CPD as daunting and overwhelming. Nevertheless, the continuous challenge lies in providing suitable resources and assistance for principals to engage in CPD. The dynamic nature of the professional domain of school principals emphasizes the systematic necessity for leaders to participate in CPD programs to bolster their instructional leadership capacities, underscoring the significance of tackling these obstacles.

2.8. Institutional Leadership Theory

Institutional leadership involves inspiring others to pursue a shared vision and mission within established parameters, fostering collaborative efforts leading to shared success [35, 36]. Effective leaders navigate and shape the organizational landscape of private preschools, considering organizational culture, climate, values, beliefs, and policy alignment with the National Education Blueprint. Research on this perspective provides insight into how institutional context shapes instructional leadership practices. Effective leaders motivate colleagues by highlighting shared objectives' benefits, encouraging participation, and valuing diverse perspectives [37]. In early childhood education, effective leadership is crucial for delivering quality care and education, supported by diverse competencies and ongoing professional development [38]. Instructional leadership among school principals enhances teaching practices, fosters professional development, and boosts teachers' self-efficacy [39, 40]. This purpose-driven approach aims at improving student academic achievements, with teaching quality significantly correlated with instructional leadership extent [20, 41].

3. Methodology

There are over 16,700 MOE established preschools, complemented by a staggering 9,100 privately established counterpart [42]. Over the past decade, enrolment in private preschools has surpassed that of public preschools, solidifying their role as a substantial contributor to early childhood education. As of 2021, private preschools represent 36% of the total enrolled student population across more than 9,100 establishments [42]. The private preschool principals included in the study were purposefully chosen from various administrative districts within the state.
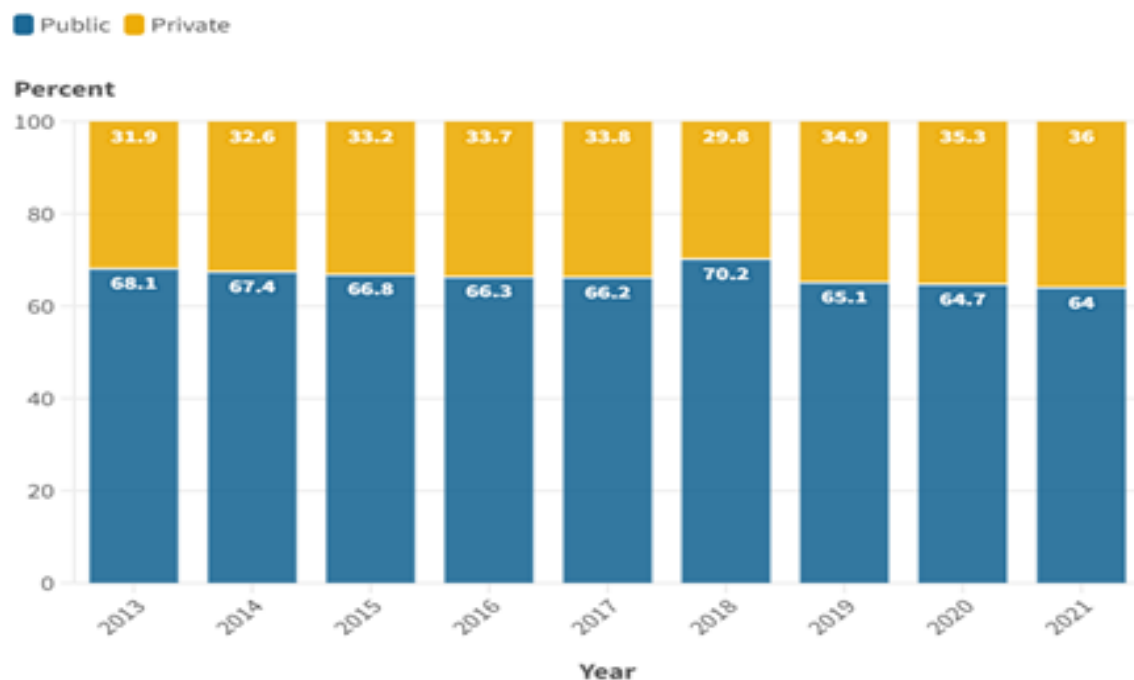

Figure 1.
Comprehensive depiction of the landscape of preschool education in Malaysia, highlighting the distinction between public and private preschools.

Qualitative research proves invaluable in grasping the fundamental elements of instructional leadership [43]. This concept inherently involves interpretation, experience, contextuality, and personal perspective, enabling researchers to glean insights from participants' lived experiences [17]. To commence the study, the researcher deliberately selected 50 private preschools. After obtaining consent from 10 private preschool principals, the researcher provided them with documentation outlining the research background and a checklist to assess their initial understanding of the interview process. The questions presented in Appendix 1 have been adapted from various researchers who explored similar themes. These questions have been refined to align with the specific focus of the study.

3.1. Population and Sample

The participants have been granted direct access and full autonomy in various aspects of school administration, including managing student-teacher dynamics, implementing and enhancing the curriculum, and maintaining relationships between families and the school. These individuals were chosen using purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling method [44]. Purposive sampling is deemed suitable when dealing with small survey samples [45]. This method involves selecting population members based on their specific knowledge and expertise in a given subject [46]. The 10 respondents were selected based on a shared characteristic: each possessed over ten years of field experience in the early childhood education sector. At the time of the interview, all participants held positions as principals in registered private preschools.

3.2. Interviews

The interview questions found in Appendix A were employed to collect data on the continuous professional development (CPD) initiatives and instructional leadership practices of private preschool principals. Standardized open-ended interviews ensured consistent responses on the research issue. One-on-one interviews allowed for in-depth exploration, facilitating follow-up questions and clarification. Questions focused on principals' competencies in instructional leadership, challenges faced, perceptions of CPD influence, and implementation of CPD knowledge. Documents reviewed included the National Education Blueprint and National Preschool Standard Curriculum, aligning gathered information with ongoing professional development and instructional leadership skills. These documents confirmed principals' instructional skills' contribution to school performance and student achievements.

3.3. Data Collection

This research aimed to gather comprehensive insights from private preschool principals through interviews, observations, and document analysis while upholding stringent ethical standards. The data collection process commenced with online interview sessions with private preschool principals, each lasting approximately one hour. Every interview was recorded, securely stored, and subsequently transcribed. Additionally, documents were scrutinized to examine background information on the research respondents, preliminary understanding checklists, and the National Education Blueprint (NEB).

3.4. Data Management

The researcher diligently transcribed and meticulously filed all information obtained during the online interview sessions. These transcriptions, systematically stored, maintained consistency by incorporating demographic information for each respondent. In an effort to uphold confidentiality and ensure anonymity, the names of the respondents were altered in the transcriptions of the video recordings. Furthermore, to enhance security, physical copies of these notes were duplicated and organized in a systematic filing structure.

3.5. Pilot Study

The pilot study, which included a retired private preschool principal with seven years and five months of experience in early childhood care and education (ECCE), identified potential issues and guided modifications to the research instruments. Following this, formal interviews were carried out with participants chosen through purposive sampling. Online interview sessions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed along with background information.

3.6. Data Formulation

The researcher adapted the coding and thematic analysis procedures for analyzing data from interviews [47]. They examined interview transcripts and other documents provided by the research participants, generating codes to identify recurring themes related to instructional leadership skills and continuous professional development [48]. These themes were subsequently organized and classified into a framework. Data were collected from diverse sources, including interviews, observations, and document reviews, enabling comparisons and validation of findings through data triangulation [49]. Semi-structured interview questions were employed to collect data from the research participants.

4. Results

Around 30% of the participants fall within the age range of 30 to 40 years, indicating a significant presence in their thirties. Another 20% belong to the 41 to 50 age group, while an additional 20% are aged between 51 and 60, suggesting considerable representation in their forties and fifties. The remaining 30% are aged 61 and above. In terms of qualifications, 20% hold a Teaching Certificate, 60% possess a Diploma, 20% have a bachelor's degree, and 10% hold a master's degree. Regarding teaching experience, 20% have 0 to 5 years, 40% have 6 to 10 years, 40% have 11 to 15 years,

20% have 16 to 20 years, and 80% have over 20 years of experience. More than 70% of the participants are above 40 years old, and all ten participants are female, with qualifications ranging from a teaching certificate to a master's degree. Additionally, approximately 70% of participants have over ten years of experience in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) industry (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Private Preschool Principals' Demographic Data includes information about the characteristics of principals in private preschools.

Demographic Variables	Category	Respondents
Age	30 - 40	3
	41- 50	2
	51-60	2
	Above 61	3
Gender	Male	0
	Female	10
Education	Teaching Certificate	2
	Diploma	6
	Bachelor's Degree	2
	Master's degree	1
Years of Teaching Experience	0-5	1
	6-10	2
	11-15	2
	16-20	1
	Above 20	4

4.1. Communication Skills

Most of the participants emphasized the pivotal role of communication skills in fostering high school performance. A recurrent theme emerged, highlighting the significance of establishing meaningful relationships with teachers. participants underscore the importance of spending quality time with teachers to understand their sentiments and challenges genuinely. This involves more than just superficial interactions but rather requires administrators to empathize and comprehend the perspectives of teachers. By consistently engaging in such meaningful interactions, trust and a supportive atmosphere are cultivated, which are essential for effective collaboration and problem-solving. Effective communication emerges as a central theme in achieving school objectives. The art of listening is emphasized as fundamental, as it signals respect and validation to teachers, encouraging them to share ideas and concerns openly. This exchange of communication fosters a collaborative spirit crucial for realizing shared goals and driving school improvement. Another significant theme identified is the embedding of positive values in teachers. Administrators are urged to instil a sense of purpose and belonging by consistently communicating and reinforcing these values. This fosters a supportive culture where teachers feel valued and understood, forming the foundation of a resilient and cohesive school community. Frequent meetings are highlighted as a vital platform for alignment, feedback, and collective problem-solving. By discussing various aspects such as student progress, lesson plans, and parent interactions, administrators and teachers maintain shared understanding and address challenges proactively. This regular engagement fosters a sense of accountability and camaraderie, driving continuous improvement within the school environment.

"Spending quality time with teachers is paramount in understanding their sentiments and challenges. It's not just about ticking boxes; it's about genuinely connecting, empathizing, and comprehending their perspective. By doing so consistently I can cultivate trust and a supportive atmosphere, which is vital for effective collaboration and problem-solving." (P1)

"Effective communication lies at the heart of achieving my school's objectives. And at the core of effective communication is the art of listening. When I actively listen to teachers, they signal respect and validation, which in turn encourages teachers to share ideas and concerns more openly. This exchange fosters a collaborative spirit essential for realizing our shared goals." (P2)

"Embedding positive values in teachers is about instilling a sense of purpose and belonging. By consistently communicating and reinforcing these values, I have not only inspired but also create a supportive culture where teachers feel valued and understood. This emotional rapport forms the bedrock of a resilient and cohesive school community." (P3)

"Frequent meetings serve as a platform for alignment, feedback, and collective problem-solving. By discussing various aspects such as student progress, lesson plans, and parent interactions, teachers and I stay on the same page and address challenges proactively. This regular engagement fosters a sense of accountability and camaraderie essential for driving continuous improvement." (P4)

4.2. Adopting Changes

A common sentiment has emerged among the research participants, emphasizing the role of adapting to current trends to enhance overall school performance. Participants emphasized the need for continuous adaptation and evolution to meet the evolving needs of students and communities. It was noted that effective change management involves proactive alignment with ongoing developments rather than mere reaction. Participants stressed the urgency of adapting to changes, particularly in the transition to online learning. They emphasized the importance of being nimble, adaptable, and equipped

with necessary resources and support to navigate these changes effectively. Embracing innovation and leveraging technology were cited as critical strategies for ensuring educational continuity amidst unprecedented challenges. Participants highlighted that principal should possess a comprehensive understanding of good governance, ensuring knowledge dissemination from top-down to grassroots levels. Additionally, practical skills such as effective communication and interpersonal interactions with parents and teachers were emphasized as crucial for successful school leadership.

"Change is absolutely essential, especially in the dynamic landscape of education. I believe that principals must continually adapt and evolve to meet the needs of the students and communities. It's not just about reacting to change but proactively aligning actions with ongoing developments to ensure relevance and effectiveness." (P5)

"The pandemic has indeed accelerated the need for change, particularly in transitioning to online learning. I would stress the importance of being nimble and adaptable, as well as having the necessary resources and support to navigate these changes effectively. It's about embracing innovation and leveraging technology to ensure continuity in education amidst unprecedented challenges." (P6)

"I believe that principals should play a pivotal role in driving change and enhancing school performance. I also feel that principals should possess a comprehensive understanding of good governance, ensuring knowledge extends from the top-down to grassroots levels. Practical skills such as effective communication and interpersonal interactions with parents and is also crucial for successful school leadership." (P7)

4.3. Delegation of Duties

The school emphasizes distributing administrative and financial responsibilities among educators and administrative assistants. This approach acknowledges the complexity of these tasks and the need for support in overseeing the school's progress and administration. By involving teachers in the management team, the school aims to foster their professional development and promote a collaborative leadership style. This inclusion of educators in administrative roles likely enhances their understanding of the school's operational aspects while also leveraging their expertise in pedagogy. A strategy employed by the school involves hiring specific staff members to handle paperwork, allowing other personnel to concentrate on student and teacher well-being. This allocation of resources reflects a prioritization of the holistic needs of the school community. Delegating administrative tasks to experienced senior teachers showcases a recognition of their competence and trustworthiness. This practice not only lightens the workload of administrative staff but also empowers veteran educators to contribute to the smooth functioning of the institution in multifaceted ways [50, 51]. The school adopts varied delegation practices to ensure efficient management, reflecting an adaptable approach to leadership. By distributing responsibilities, the school maintains a comprehensive focus on both administrative and pedagogical aspects of leadership, recognizing the importance of attending to all facets of school functioning. Involving teachers in decision-making processes further promotes a collaborative ethos, ensuring that the perspectives of frontline educators are integrated into strategic planning and operational decisions.

Overall, these practices demonstrate a thoughtful approach to organizational management, balancing administrative efficiency with a commitment to professional development, collaboration, and holistic support for the school community.

"In my school, I believe in distributing administrative and financial responsibilities among the teachers. It's crucial for us to have support in overseeing the school's progress and administration due to the complexity of these tasks. I found that involving teachers in the management team fosters their development and encourages a collaborative approach to leadership." (P8)

"One of the strategies I have employed is hiring teachers who can also handle paperwork, which allows me to focus on the overall well-being of students and teachers. Additionally, I also delegate administrative tasks to experienced senior teachers whom I trust to handle these responsibilities effectively. It's about recognizing the capabilities of the longstanding staff members and empowering them in their roles." (P9)

"At my school, I have adopted varied delegation practices to ensure efficient management. I understand the importance of distributing responsibilities to maintain a comprehensive focus on both administrative and pedagogical aspects of teachers. For me, it's about ensuring that every aspect of school functioning receives the attention it deserves, whether it's through delegating tasks or involving teachers in decision-making processes." (P10)

4.4. Challenging Parental Expectations.

The statements highlight the challenge of managing parental expectations in private preschools, where parents often seek extra services beyond what the school provides, despite substantial fees.

This theme underscores the pressure principals face in negotiating these demands while maintaining the integrity of the school's educational mission. The pursuit of additional offerings by parents limits the flexibility of principals in implementing instructional leadership, as they must balance parental expectations with providing a high-quality educational experience for students.

Another significant challenge mentioned is the interference of parents in the teaching process, where they feel entitled to dictate instructions to teachers. This interference disrupts the educational environment and undermines the authority of principals as educational leaders. Addressing this issue without risking conflict with parents poses a considerable challenge, impacting the school's ability to maintain a conducive learning environment for students. The shortage of specialized manpower in early childhood education presents a pressing challenge for private preschools. Meeting parental expectations for highly educated teachers becomes difficult, especially when resources are limited, and demand outweighs supply.

Despite efforts to recruit and retain qualified staff, managing high demands while navigating shortages in specialized personnel remains an ongoing struggle for principals.

"As a private preschool principal, I find myself constantly challenged by the expectations of parents who seek additional offerings beyond what our school provides. Despite the substantial fees for our services, parents assertively pursue extra services, leaving me with limited flexibility in negotiating their demands. This constraint hampers my ability to effectively implement instructional leadership. The increasing demand in early childhood education only exacerbates these difficulties, as I strive to balance meeting parental expectations with providing a high-quality educational experience for our students." (P4)

"The interference of parents in the teaching process is a significant challenge I face as a preschool principal. Parents often feel entitled to dictate instructions to teachers, disrupting the educational environment and undermining my authority as an educational leader. This dynamic creates tension within the school community and hampers efforts to maintain a conducive learning environment for students. Despite the best efforts, it's challenging to address this issue without risking conflict with parents." (P6)

"One of the most pressing challenges in private preschools is the shortage of specialized manpower in early childhood education. Meeting parents' expectations for highly educated teachers poses a considerable hurdle, especially when resources are limited. Despite my effort to recruit and retain qualified staff, the demand often outweighs the supply. Additionally, the persistent sentiment among parents that the offerings fall short of their expectations adds another layer of complexity to the leadership role. Despite my dedication to providing ample resources, managing these high demands while navigating shortages in specialized personnel remains an ongoing struggle." (P7)

4.5. High Supervision on Teachers

The challenges identified in motivating teachers within private preschools are multifaceted and impactful. Firstly, there's a recurring issue of some teachers demonstrating a lack of interest in adopting new ideas and methodologies, hindering professional development efforts and impeding the establishment of a culture that values continuous learning. Secondly, there's a notable concern regarding certain teachers viewing their roles primarily as a means of monetary compensation rather than being driven by genuine passion for teaching [52]. This perspective undermines efforts to cultivate dynamic and engaging learning environments, ultimately affecting the quality of education provided to students. Additionally, resistance among teachers towards taking on additional responsibilities further complicates matters. Overcoming this resistance necessitates effective communication and support from leadership to foster a collaborative and supportive environment that prioritizes professional development and nurtures a sincere passion for teaching. Addressing these challenges is essential for promoting teacher growth and enhancing the overall educational experience for students within private preschool settings.

"One of the recurring issues I've noticed is a lack of confidence among some of my teachers, particularly in creating a creative lesson plans. Many seem hesitant and unsure about the best approaches. It's become clear that they need more support and guidance in this area to feel empowered in their roles. I have been implementing more extensive mentorship programs and offering regular workshops focused on lesson planning and instructional strategies. Additionally, I've personally been making rounds more frequently to provide feedback and encouragement". (P2)

"I have observed that some teachers struggle with maintaining patience, especially when dealing with energetic or disruptive students. It's understandable, but it's crucial for creating a positive learning environment. I have been working on strategies to help teachers develop more effective classroom management techniques and cultivate patience. I have introduced training sessions focused on behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. Additionally, I've encouraged more collaboration among teachers to share strategies that have worked for them". (P3)

"Language proficiency has been a concern, particularly when teachers use a mix of languages and accents in their communication with students. It can sometimes lead to confusion or misunderstanding. I've been emphasizing the importance of clarity and consistency in communication. Ensuring that teachers consistently follow the curriculum has been a priority. I've implemented regular check-ins and reviews to monitor progress and address any deviations. It's essential for maintaining academic standards and ensuring that students receive a consistent educational experience". (P5)

4.6. Reluctance to Enhance Skills

Continuous improvement in concepts, skills, and knowledge is essential for teachers in early childhood education. However, private preschool principals encountered numerous challenges in motivating their teachers to enhance their proficiency in teaching and learning. According to one participant, some teachers displayed a lack of interest in embracing new ideas, hindering their professional development. Another principal highlighted a concerning trend where certain teachers were merely fulfilling their roles for monetary compensation, lacking genuine passion for teaching. The struggle to encourage teacher commitment was further exemplified by instances of resignations occurring when additional duties were assigned. This indicated a resistance among teachers to take on increased responsibilities within the educational setting. Additionally, a participant expressed concern over some teachers' preferences, noting that they occasionally prioritized playing with their phones over engaging in educational reading. The analysis underscores the formidable task faced by private preschool principals in fostering a culture of continuous improvement among teachers. The identified challenges, including a lack of interest, a focus on monetary incentives, resistance to additional responsibilities, and distractions from educational pursuits, collectively contribute to the complex landscape of teacher motivation and professional development within these educational institutions.

"As a preschool principal, I've certainly encountered challenges in motivating our teachers to continuously enhance their skills and knowledge in early childhood education. One of the recurring issues I face is a lack of interest among some teachers when it comes to embracing new ideas and methodologies. It can be disheartening to witness this, as professional development is crucial in this field. I strive to create a culture where learning is valued and encouraged, but it's an ongoing effort". (P1)

"In my experience as a private preschool principal, I've observed a concerning trend where some teachers seem to view their roles solely as a means of monetary compensation rather than a passion for teaching. This can pose significant challenges in fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment for the students. I've constantly endeavour to instil a sense of purpose and dedication in my educators, but it's a complex issue that requires ongoing attention and support". (P6)

"As someone deeply invested in the field of early childhood education, I understand the challenges faced by private preschool principals in motivating teachers to continually improve their proficiency. One issue that stands out is the resistance some teachers demonstrate when additional responsibilities are introduced. It's crucial for educators to embrace growth opportunities, but overcoming this resistance requires careful communication and support. I must work together to create a collaborative and supportive environment that values professional development and fosters a genuine passion for teaching". (P7)

4.7. Life-long Learning

All participants emphasize the significance of CPD in staying updated with the latest methodologies, research findings, and best practices. They stress that CPD goes beyond mere attendance at workshops or courses; it involves adopting a mindset of continual growth and improvement. This aligns with the dynamic nature of education, where evolving strategies are necessary to cater to the diverse needs of young learners. Practical experiences are deemed essential in professional development, enabling educators to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. Participants advocate for hands-on learning through workshops, observations, and collaborative projects. By experiencing different teaching methods firsthand, educators gain valuable insights that inform their decision-making processes, fostering a culture of critical thinking and innovation. Participants prioritize reflective practice and actively seek out opportunities for CPD, such as attending conferences, participating in online courses, and collaborating with colleagues. They emphasize the importance of implementing insights gained through CPD to create engaging and effective learning environments for children. This highlights a commitment to continual improvement and ensuring the best possible education and support for young learners' development.

"Continuous Professional Development is vital in this field because it allows educators, to stay updated with the latest methodologies, research findings, and best practices in early childhood education. It's not just about attending workshops or courses; it's about adopting a mindset of continual growth and improvement. By actively engaging in CPD, teachers enhance skills, deepen their knowledge, and refine their teaching approaches, ultimately creating more enriching experiences for the young learners". (P8)

"Practical experiences play a crucial role in professional development as they provide opportunities for hands-on learning and reflection. As a principal, I encourage my staff to participate in workshops, observe experienced educators in action, and engage in collaborative projects that allow them to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. By experiencing different teaching methods and witnessing the impact firsthand, I gain valuable insights in my decision-making processes. This approach fosters a culture of critical thinking and innovation, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students". (P9)

"Continuous Professional Development is instrumental in driving continual improvement in teaching practices because it allows educators to stay abreast of emerging trends, research findings, and innovative approaches in early childhood education. As a principal, I actively seek out opportunities for CPD, such as attending conferences, participating in online courses, and collaborating with colleagues. Additionally, I prioritize reflective practice, regularly reviewing and evaluating teaching methods to identify areas for improvement. By implementing insights gained through CPD, I strive to create a more engaging and effective learning environment for teachers, ensuring that students receive the best possible education and support for their development". (P10)

4.8. Enhancing Teaching and Learning Practices

Attendance at training sessions and workshops equips educators with practical instructional guidance, expands their knowledge base, and instils confidence in their leadership abilities. Incorporating insights from these sessions into teaching strategies aligns practices with the school's vision and goals. Additionally, encouraging teachers to engage in continuous learning fosters a culture of growth and excellence within institutions. Staying updated with the latest research and best practices is essential for ensuring high-quality education. Proactively integrating insights gained from workshops into teaching strategies allows educators to adapt and refine approaches to better meet students' needs. Furthermore, promoting continuous learning among teachers cultivates a culture of innovation and improvement, ultimately enhancing the overall learning experience for students. Recognizing the importance of staying abreast of changes in education, educational institutions prioritize CPD. They provide teachers with opportunities to attend relevant workshops, conferences, and training sessions and support ongoing learning initiatives with resources, time for professional development, and encouragement to explore new methodologies and approaches. Investing in teachers' CPD ensures they remain informed, competitive, and capable of providing the best possible education to students.

"Attending training sessions and workshops has been instrumental in equipping me with practical instructional guidance that I can implement within my school. These opportunities have not only expanded my knowledge base but also

instilled confidence in my ability to lead effectively. By incorporating insights gained from these sessions into our teaching strategies, I've been able to align our practices with our school's vision and goals. Furthermore, I've encouraged my teachers to also engage in continuous learning, fostering a culture of growth and excellence within our institution". (P3)

"I believe that staying updated with the latest research and best practices is essential for ensuring the quality of education provided to young learners. By proactively incorporating insights gained from workshops into our teaching strategies, I can adapt and refine our approaches to better meet the needs of students. Additionally, by encouraging my teachers to engage in continuous learning, I foster a culture of innovation and improvement within the educational setting, ultimately enhancing the overall learning experience for the students". (P4)

"Continuous Professional Development is a priority within my educational institution because I recognize the importance of staying abreast of constant changes within the field of education. I provide my teachers with opportunities to attend workshops, conferences, and training sessions relevant to early childhood education. Additionally, I also support their ongoing learning initiatives by providing resources, time for professional development, and encouragement to explore new methodologies and approaches. By investing in my teachers' CPD, I ensure that they remain informed, competitive, and able to provide the best possible education to the students". (P5)

4.9. Expanding Instructional Leadership Skills Training

A notable gap in leadership-focused training opportunities is highlighted. This observation suggests that while educators receive comprehensive training in pedagogy and child development, there is insufficient emphasis on developing leadership skills necessary for guiding and supporting teams effectively. Proactive measures taken by the individual or organization to address the identified gap in leadership training. This includes organizing in-house training sessions focused on enhancing teaching skills, such as phonics and classroom management techniques. The belief that investing in enhancing teaching skills is crucial for the professional growth of the team. This indicates a strategic approach to prioritize the improvement of instructional quality as a means to foster overall team development. The prioritization of mentorship as a key component of training. This involves assessing individual teachers' proficiency levels and providing targeted mentorship to address areas of weakness while leveraging their strengths in teaching. A hands-on approach to mentorship, indicating active involvement in guiding and supporting teachers. This approach is designed to foster not only the professional growth of individual educators but also to enhance overall instructional quality within the educational setting. The training approach aims to create a culture of continual improvement and excellence in early childhood education. This indicates a broader organizational goal to instil a mindset of growth and excellence among educators. The proactive measures and hands-on mentorship approach underscore a commitment to fostering professional growth and enhancing instructional quality within the organization.

"In my experience, the majority of training opportunities have been concentrated on various aspects of early childhood education, with limited exposure to leadership-focused courses. While I've engaged extensively in courses related to early childhood care and education (ECCE) teaching methodologies and child development, there's been a noticeable gap in leadership-oriented training. This has provided me with a solid foundation in pedagogy but has left me seeking further development in leadership skills to effectively guide and support my team." (2)

"As a proactive measure, I've organized in-house training sessions focused on enhancing teaching skills rather than solely on leadership development. These sessions cover subject-specific topics like phonics for children and classroom management techniques. While there's been a gap in leadership-focused training opportunities, I believe that investing in enhancing teaching skills is crucial for the professional growth of my team. By providing targeted training, I aim to improve instructional quality and create a supportive environment for continual improvement." (8)

"In my approach, I prioritize mentorship as a key component of training. I assess teachers' proficiency levels and actively mentor them to address areas of weakness while leveraging their strengths in teaching. This hands-on approach not only fosters the professional growth of individual teachers but also enhances the overall instructional quality within my educational setting. By providing targeted support and guidance, I strive to create a culture of continual improvement and excellence in early childhood education." (9)

4.10. Degree Requirement for Principals in Private Preschools

The preschool leader emphasizes the significance of practical experience in the ECE field, highlighting the invaluable insights gained from working directly with children and managing classrooms over the years. This indicates a recognition of the unique challenges and nuances of the field that can only be understood through hands-on experience. There's an acknowledgment of the importance of striking a balance between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. This suggests an understanding that while academic qualifications provide a foundation, practical experience enhances the ability to apply that knowledge effectively in real classroom settings. The leader prioritizes essential skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and a deep understanding of child development when hiring for leadership positions. This indicates a belief that these skills are fundamental to success in the ECE field, possibly even more so than academic qualifications alone. The leader observes that individuals with practical experience seamlessly integrate into the school environment and make a significant impact on both staff and children. This suggests that hands-on experience fosters a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the educational setting, leading to more effective leadership. The leader cites success stories of principals who started from entry-level positions with diplomas and progressed through hands-on experience. This illustrates a pathway to leadership that values practical experience and gradual advancement within the organization. There's an emphasis on evaluating candidates based on their ability to apply knowledge in real-world

scenarios and navigate the complexities of ECE. This indicates a holistic approach to hiring that considers not only academic qualifications but also the passion, drive, and practical skills of candidates. The leader highlights the importance of making a meaningful difference in the preschool community, suggesting a commitment to nurturing a positive learning environment and supporting the growth and development of both staff and children.

"In my experience, I've found that candidates with significant practical experience often bring invaluable insights to the table. While academic qualifications are certainly beneficial, nothing quite compares to the hands-on knowledge gained through years of working directly with children and managing classrooms. It's about finding that balance between knowledge and real-world applications." (P1)

When I was hiring for teachers' positions, I prioritize candidates who possess not only the necessary qualifications but also the essential skills required to excel in this field. Effective communication, teamwork, and a deep understanding of child development are paramount. I have seen firsthand how individuals with a strong foundation in practical experience can seamlessly integrate into my school environment and make a significant impact on both staff and children alike."(P2)

I've seen remarkable success stories among my teachers who've risen through the ranks, starting from entry-level positions with diplomas and gradually advancing with hands-on experience. While academic qualifications are important, they're just one piece of the puzzle. What truly sets teachers apart is their ability to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios and effectively navigate the complexities of early childhood education. It's about finding teachers who not only have the credentials but also the passion and drive to make a meaningful difference in the preschool community." (P3)

4.11. Time Constraints

The principals encountered demanding schedules, requiring their full dedication to school-related duties. Their roles entailed close collaboration with teachers, children, parents, administrators, and government entities to fulfil their school visions. A common challenge highlighted was the limited time available, often leading to conflicts with other commitments. Additionally, family responsibilities and logistical obstacles, such as distance to training venues, hindered attendance at courses. Despite acknowledging the importance of training, some principals struggled to find time amidst their responsibilities to children and communication with parents. The analysis revealed a shared interest in training opportunities, constrained by time availability. One principal explicitly mentioned work commitments hindering time allocation for such pursuits. The analysis underscores the pervasive issue of time constraints impacting principals' engagement in professional development, reflecting the complexity of their roles amidst competing demands.

"Time management is undoubtedly a constant challenge in my role as principals. While I recognize the importance of ongoing training and professional development, the reality is that my schedules are often stretched thin with various responsibilities. It's a balancing act between meeting the immediate needs of the school community and finding time for own growth and development. I am keenly interested in training opportunities but often find myself grappling with competing priorities." (P4)

"As a principal, my days are filled with a myriad of tasks and responsibilities, leaving little room for additional commitments like training courses. While I understand the value of continuous learning, practical challenges such as family obligations and logistical barriers sometimes make it difficult to prioritize professional development. It's not a lack of interest but rather a struggle to carve out time amidst the demands of my role." (P5)

"Finding time for training amidst the hectic schedules is a constant juggling act. I have pulled in multiple directions, from collaborating with staff and engaging with parents to managing administrative tasks and liaising with education authorities. While I recognize the importance of staying updated with the latest practices and methodologies, the reality is that time constraints often limit the ability to participate fully in training opportunities. It's a challenge that I continue to navigate as I strive to balance the responsibilities and personal growth." (P6)

4.12. Insufficient Financial Resources

Private preschool principals encountered challenges accessing high-quality courses due to substantial associated fees, hindering their investment in effective Continuous Professional Development (CPD) initiatives. Financial constraints prevented them from affording valuable training programs, limiting their capacity to support staff training initiatives. The high cost of materials associated with learned concepts further impeded practical application. Principals expressed shared sentiment regarding affordability issues, acknowledging courses beyond their financial means and the inability to support group attendance due to overall expense. These financial limitations pose a significant impediment to pursuing high-quality courses and comprehensive professional development, underscoring the struggle to enhance educational quality within these institutions.

"The financial constraints I face as principal is a significant barrier to accessing the quality training programs necessary for effective professional development. While I understand the importance of investing in the staff's growth, the reality is that limited budgets often restrict my ability to afford high-quality courses. It's frustrating to see valuable opportunities out of reach due to financial limitations, hindering the efforts to enhance educational quality within our preschool."(P7)

"Asa principal, I am aware of the importance of continuous professional development for me and my staff. However, the substantial fees associated with many courses often pose a significant challenge. Despite best intentions, the reality of budget constraints means I was forced to prioritize and sometimes forego valuable training programs. It's disheartening to see the potential for growth hindered by financial limitations." (P8)

"The struggle to access high-quality courses due to financial constraints is a common concern among preschool principals. While I recognize the value of comprehensive professional development, the reality is that limited budgets often

prevent me from investing in the training programs our staff and students deserve. It's a frustrating reality that underscores the need for greater support and resources to ensure that educational quality remains a top priority despite financial limitations." (P9)

4.13. Challenges in Executing Ideas

Private preschool principals face challenges in applying Continuous Professional Development (CPD) knowledge within their schools. Language proficiency among graduates poses a barrier, hindering effective implementation of concepts. Teachers' resistance to change and reluctance to embrace innovative approaches also impede successful implementation. Additionally, a digital divide among senior teachers hampers effective handling of digital equipment and materials. Some teachers are sceptical about the feasibility of new ideas with children, further hindering implementation efforts. These challenges highlight the complexity of translating CPD knowledge into actionable practices in preschool settings.

"Implementing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) knowledge within my school poses unique challenges, particularly regarding language proficiency and resistance to change among teachers. Despite investing in training and development, language barriers sometimes hinder effective communication and implementation of new concepts. Additionally, some teachers may be hesitant to embrace innovative approaches, requiring additional support and encouragement to foster a culture of openness to change."(P5)

"Navigating the transition from CPD knowledge to actionable practices within my preschool can be daunting, especially when faced with teachers' resistance to change and digital literacy gaps among senior staff. Overcoming these hurdles requires a multifaceted approach, including targeted training programs, ongoing support, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Addressing scepticism and providing hands-on guidance can help bridge the gap between senior and junior staff." (P8)

"The challenges in applying CPD knowledge within my preschool underscore the importance of addressing barriers such as language proficiency, resistance to change, and digital literacy gaps among staff. It's crucial to provide comprehensive support and resources to empower teachers to effectively implement new concepts and methodologies. By fostering a culture of collaboration and professional growth, these challenges can be overcome and ensure that CPD knowledge translates into meaningful practices that benefit both teachers and students." (P10)

4.14. Required CPD Credit Hours for Private Preschool Principals

Principals in early childhood education perceive Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as valuable for improving their skills and knowledge. Many see it as beneficial, especially for young leaders aiming to enhance their expertise. Some support mandatory CPD hours, particularly when overseen by the government, as a means to ensure continuous learning and professional development. However, not all agree; concerns exist that mandatory CPD could be exploited for financial gain by various entities. This spectrum of opinions highlights the nuanced perspectives among principals regarding the benefits and drawbacks of compulsory CPD in early childhood education. It underscores the need for careful consideration of implications and mechanisms surrounding mandatory CPD requirements in this field.

"I wholeheartedly support the idea of mandatory Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in early childhood education. As a young leader myself, I recognize the immense value in continually enhancing our knowledge and skills to better serve our students and communities. Having structured CPD hours facilitated by the Ministry of Education would provide much-needed guidance and ensure that all educators have access to relevant and high-quality training opportunities."(P2)

"While I see the potential benefits of mandatory CPD hours, I also have concerns about the practicality and potential for misuse. While it's essential to prioritize ongoing learning and professional development, there's a need to ensure that any mandatory requirements are implemented thoughtfully and transparently. We must guard against the possibility of CPD becoming a burden or a tool for financial exploitation." (P3)

"I have reservations about making CPD hours mandatory, as I worry it could inadvertently create additional challenges for educators. While continuous learning is vital, I'm concerned about the feasibility and potential costs associated with mandatory CPD requirements. We need to carefully consider the implications and ensure that any mandatory CPD initiatives are well-designed and equitable for all educators." (P5)

5. Discussion

This study addresses a literature gap on private preschool principals' instructional leadership concerning the National Education Blueprint, contributing to existing research on competencies, implementation, and perceptions of continuous professional development (CPD). It enhances understanding of challenges in instructional leadership implementation and CPD acquisition. Key competencies identified include communication skills, staying updated with industry knowledge, and mastering administrative delegation. Findings aim to guide improvements in principals' competencies, foster positive perceptions of CPD, and address challenges in implementation and acquisition. Challenges include demanding parents impacting school visions and teachers' lack of confidence consuming principals' time. Principals express interest in ECCE enhancement and prioritize working experiences over academic qualifications. Hindrances to CPD acquisition include time constraints, cost, and implementation challenges. Most principals favor mandatory CPD credit hours yearly to elevate professionalism.

5.1. Competencies in Instructional Leadership for School Principals

The results indicate that private preschool principals possess the essential competencies required for implementing instructional leadership skills, aligning with the objectives outlined in the National Education Blueprint (NEB). The emphasis placed on effective communication skills with key stakeholders, including children, teachers, and parents, underscores the importance of instructional leadership alongside administrative leadership [53]. Outstanding principals who prioritize instructional leadership demonstrate exemplary leadership behaviors capable of driving educational progress and transformation [48]. Additionally, the data collected suggests that principals are motivated to stay abreast of educational programs and policies established by the Ministry of Education (MOE), as their motivation influences teachers' functional competency and knowledge [27]. Moreover, principals' proficiency in delegating administrative tasks indicates a clear objective of enhancing school performance and overall student achievements. This finding is consistent with the findings of Chen [54] which confirms that instructional leadership behavior positively impacts all stakeholders in early childhood education.

5.2. Challenges in Implementing Instructional Leadership for School Principals

The research findings unveiled three primary challenges encountered by private preschool principals in implementing instructional leadership within preschools. Firstly, demanding parents posed a challenge, as their frequent interruptions and instructions to teachers disrupted the execution of instructional leadership skills. The principals' shortcomings in enhancing their communication skills, as highlighted by Downer, et al. [55] could hinder their effectiveness in implementing instructional leadership with teachers. Secondly, there was a noted need for heightened supervision of teachers at school to ensure smooth teaching and learning processes. The lack of allocated time for professional development might contribute to principals' insufficient confidence in exercising instructional leadership skills, as suggested by Jackson, et al. [56]. Additionally, the reluctance of teachers to improve presented a barrier to principals in implementing instructional leadership. The principals' inability to effectively communicate the school's mission to teachers could lead to challenges in articulating and implementing instructional leadership skills, as noted by Siraj, et al. [17]. This finding underscores a potential necessity for comprehensive induction programs for school principals prior to their appointment and continuous professional development throughout their tenure. The study emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development in enhancing principals' instructional leadership skills to support teachers' development and facilitate continuous improvement, as highlighted by Robertson, et al. [57].

5.3. Perceptions and Needs of School Principals Regarding CPD

The findings indicate that principals hold positive perceptions and express needs regarding Continuous Professional Development (CPD), demonstrating a keen interest in training focused on instructional leadership skills to enhance their comprehension and application in schools. They perceive CPD as essential for lifelong learning and professional growth, recognizing it as a requisite for advancing in their roles. Principals value systematic training approaches such as peer collaboration, school walkthroughs, and coaching to augment their performance. They exhibit instructional leadership by delineating school missions, overseeing curriculum content, supervising teaching and learning initiatives, monitoring student performance, and cultivating a positive school environment. CPD is deemed critical for enhancing teaching and learning practices, with the concepts, skills, and knowledge acquired being directly applicable to school-based activities. Principals feel a sense of accountability for school performance and student achievement post-participation in professional development. However, they prioritize practical experiences over educational credentials in early childhood education, as the impact of academic qualifications on children's achievement may not consistently be significant. It is suggested to emphasize teacher training programs leading to a certificate in early childhood education over a degree, aligning with previous viewpoints.

5.4. Challenges in Applying CPD Knowledge

The initial challenge identified was the scarcity of time, with no dedicated slot allocated for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) within the principals' already packed schedules. This circumstance could be ascribed to a tendency to prioritize students' learning and accomplishments over their own ongoing learning, potentially reflecting a perceived lack of significance and immediacy in updating pedagogical knowledge [58]. Another challenge brought to light in the findings was the financial constraints encountered by private preschool principals who self-finance their CPD endeavors. Seeking funding from local, state, or national foundations could mitigate these financial obstacles and bolster support for professional development initiatives [59]. Furthermore, the principals expressed receptiveness to the notion of earning mandatory CPD credit hours annually to renew their teaching licenses, illustrating an awareness of the beneficial impact of professional development in fostering a positive school culture and climate [33]. The third challenge underscored in the study pertains to the difficulty in implementing ideas gleaned from CPD. Principals encountered impediments in putting instructional skills into practice due to a lack of readiness from other stakeholders, notably teachers, which dampened their enthusiasm to enhance instructional leadership. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Tympa, et al. [60] which reported that approximately one-third of principals were disinclined to support instructional leadership practices across the system.

5.5. Policy Implications

The National Education Blueprint (NEB) prioritizes nurturing school leaders with strong instructional leadership skills to enhance preschool performance and student achievement. Private preschool principals emphasize communication,

delegation, and staying updated with MOE programs. They recognize Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as crucial for lifelong learning and school improvement. Challenges include dealing with demanding parents, teacher shortages, time and financial constraints, and difficulty implementing CPD ideas. Limited monitoring exacerbates these challenges, necessitating standardized policies and regulatory governance bodies. Recommendations include mandatory CPD hours for principals and robust regulation to ensure effective instructional leadership and CPD implementation in private preschools.

5.6. Practical Implications

This study carries significant implications for the effective integration and acquisition of instructional leadership skills and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) among private preschool principals. It is apparent that these principals display a positive inclination towards keeping abreast of current trends in teaching and learning, showcasing a dedication to lifelong learning within the early childhood education sector. Aligned with the objectives of the National Education Blueprint (NEB), which seeks to nurture highly competent instructional school leaders and encourage their participation in CPD, there is a clear imperative to enhance the instructional leadership skills of these principals. To enhance their instructional leadership abilities, principals must achieve mastery, knowledge, and comprehension of implementing these skills with key stakeholders within their schools. This necessitates ongoing reflection on managing school curriculum content, supervising teaching and learning programs, monitoring and guiding teachers' performances, and overseeing students' overall achievements. The expressed desire for additional training, workshops, and conferences centred on instructional leadership skills indicates a strong appetite for professional development in this domain. Seeking expertise from professionals in the instructional leadership field is vital for establishing a robust foundation for career advancement. Effective training for school leaders not only provides them with the requisite skills but also motivates them to apply the acquired knowledge to enhance school performance and overall student achievements. Networking opportunities with professionals in similar fields empower these principals, instilling a positive attitude towards embracing challenges. Additionally, collaboration among principals offers a platform to leverage individual strengths and amalgamate them to gain a broader national perspective in practicing instructional leadership skills for the betterment of their respective schools. This collaborative approach enhances collective capacity and knowledge within the educational leadership community, thereby contributing to improved instructional leadership practices and favourable outcomes for schools and students.

6. Limitations

This study faced several limitations, primarily stemming from the COVID-19 epidemic. The research coincided with the post pandemic whereby the private preschool principals were occupied in rebuilding their institutions after managing the online teaching during pandemic, making it challenging to secure appointments and collect data. The stringent "Standard Operating Procedures" imposed during post pandemic also poses restriction to physical access to preschools by outsiders. This limitation affected the use of the observation method, hindering the gathering of firsthand information on settings, routines, and behaviours of private preschool principals. Additionally, the changes in preschool settings, including strict SOPs and increased paperwork, resulted in many principals declining participation due to time constraints and workforce limitations.

7. Proposed for Future Research

The conclusions drawn from this qualitative case study are constrained to a particular geographical area and a sample size of ten research participants [61]. Subsequent research initiatives could broaden the scope by investigating private preschool principals' competencies in implementing instructional leadership skills and their perceptions and requirements regarding Continuous Professional Development (CPD) across a more diverse demographic representation or through comparisons among different countries. A larger sample size of research respondents would provide a more comprehensive understanding. The current research methodology relies on a qualitative approach. To enrich data collection in future studies, scholars might consider employing a mixed-method case study design, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the research. Future studies should prioritize on-site observations in the physical settings of research respondents to gather pertinent data. Additionally, this study involves only one stakeholder, namely private preschool principals. To deepen the insights of this research, future scholars may consider involving teachers and other relevant MOE bodies, broadening the perspectives, and enriching the depth of the study.

8. Conclusion

Preschool principals hold vital roles in the success of early childhood education. Their competence in instructional leadership and a clear understanding of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) are essential in shaping favorable school outcomes and overall student accomplishments. Aligned with the National Education Blueprint, achieving vision and aspiration goals requires consistent investment in pedagogical, instructional, and interpersonal skills through ongoing professional development for preschool principals. The application of expertise in instructional leadership not only enhances school performance but also expedites outcomes that enrich the quality of early childhood curriculum. Ultimately, this positive influence contributes to fostering constructive social change within our educational community.

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Appendix A.
Adaptation of Questions from Prior Research.

Interview Questions	Adapted Interview Questions	Source
How would you define leadership in early childhood education?	What is your understanding of early childhood leadership?	Hazegh [62]
What skills do you think are crucial for being an effective leader in early childhood programs?	In your view, what are the essential skills that a school leader should possess?	
In what ways can leaders in early childhood education play a role in fostering a supportive community to benefit both students and staff?	How can school principals facilitate improvements in school performance and overall student achievements?	
What do you perceive as the primary challenges confronting leaders in early childhood education?	What are some of the issues and challenges you encounter in your daily responsibilities as a school leader?	
Can you share an instance of a difficult situation you encountered while collaborating with parents?	Could you discuss a specific challenge you've encountered with either teachers or parents?	Sands and Meadan [40]
How do you believe leaders in early childhood education can contribute to enhancing the professional capabilities of their staff?	What steps do you take to enhance the competencies of your teachers within the school?	
How do you think your leadership would be described by others?	How might your leadership be described by both your teachers and parents?	To, et al. [3]
What adjectives would you use to characterize your leadership approach?	How would you characterize your own leadership abilities?	Chen [54]
How do you address conflicts that arise within the center?	How do you approach problem-solving within your school?	
What is the vision for your school?	Could you share the vision statement for your school?	Siraj, et al. [17]
Can you describe a typical day in your role as a school administrator?	Can you walk me through a typical day in your role as a school principal?	
Can you provide an example of a time when you witnessed an improvement in the teaching and learning environment at your school, and how did you discern it was indeed an improvement?	Can you provide an example of a positive change you've observed in the teaching and learning environment within your school?	
How would you define professional	When you hear the term continuous	Rieckhoff and Larsen [63]

Interview Questions	Adapted Interview Questions	Source
development or what does professional development mean to you?	professional development, what thoughts come to mind?	
What professional development activities have been provided by your elementary/middle school, and have you taken part in any of them?	What are some examples of continuous professional development activities provided by your preschool that you have participated in?	
Could you share the most impactful professional development experience you've had in the past decade?	Reflecting on the past ten years, what was the most valuable and effective continuous professional development experience you've encountered?	
How many teachers have you provided mentorship to in the last ten years?	How many lead teachers and teachers have you provided mentorship to in the last decade?	
What are your thoughts on the necessity of formal education and degree requirements for center directors?	What are your views on the necessity of degree requirements for preschool principals?	Hazegh [62]
Have you engaged in professional development focused on early childhood education topics, and if so, how do you believe it benefits you as a school administrator?	Have you engaged in continuous professional development focused on principal leadership roles and responsibilities, as well as topics related to early childhood education?	Zinsser, et al. [53]
Have you organized professional development opportunities for your early childhood staff?	How does continuous professional development assist you in addressing your personal and career aspirations as a school leader?	
When seeking information or knowledge for your work, do you utilize any of the following sources?	In your opinion, what are the critical areas of continuous professional development for your teachers?	
What obstacles have hindered your pursuit of professional development?	What resources do you utilize to acquire information or knowledge related to school leadership, school performance, and student achievement?	Luo, et al. [15]
Can you discuss the resources and support you've requested to become more involved in the professional development process?	What obstacles do you encounter in accessing continuous professional development opportunities?	Äikäs, et al. [64]
How would you define professional development or what does professional development mean to you?	What challenges do you face in implementing the knowledge gained from continuous professional development at your school?	Partee, et al. [6]

Appendix B.
Interview Questions.
1. What phrases come to mind when considering "Early Childhood Leadership"? Select all that apply:
   - Understanding young children's characteristics and needs.
   - Understanding children's developmental stages and growth from birth through age eight.
   - Understanding the current issues and trends in early childhood education.
   - Acquiring academic discipline to design, implement, and evaluate learning experiences for children.
   - Managing and guiding high-quality teachers.
   - Creating respectful and reciprocal relationships that support and empower families.
   - Others:

2. What phrases come to mind when considering "Instructional Leadership"? Select all that apply:
   - Defining school mission.
   - Managing curriculum contents.
   - Supervising teaching and learning programs.
   - Monitoring and guiding teachers' performances.
   - Monitoring and guiding students' overall achievements.
   - Others:

3. What phrases come to mind when considering "Competencies related to Instructional Leadership"? Select all that apply:
    *   Managing teachers' behavior and performances.
    *   Managing students' behavior and academic performances.
    *   Monitoring and assessing early childhood programs.
    *   Building relationships with parents.
    *   Creating and developing a positive school culture.
    *   Others:

4. What phrases come to mind when considering "Continuous Professional Development"? Check all that apply.
    *   Training workshops.
    *   Conferences.
    *   E-learning programs.
    *   Workplace training.
    *   Professional education.
    *   Coaching from others.
    *   Others:

5. What phrases come to mind when considering "School Performances"? Select all that apply.
    *   Academic performances.
    *   Goals and objectives of a program.
    *   Intellectual level of teachers and students.
    *   Motivation level of teachers and students.
    *   Teacher-student relationship.
    *   School-family relationship.
    *   Others:

6. What phrases come to mind when considering "Students' Overall Achievements"? Select all that apply.
    *   Developed positive social-emotional skills (shows affection to others, expresses feelings with words, displays self-control and positive self-image).
    *   Good at practical life skills (brushing teeth, getting dressed, toileting, and cleaning up after themselves).
    *   Acquired language arts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).
    *   Grasped subject-matter knowledge (Bahasa Malaysia, English, Science, and Mathematics).
    *   Modeled appropriate behavior.
    *   Others:

7. What methods did you employ to mentor your teachers? Check all that apply.
    *   Observation
    *   Provide feedback.
    *   Meeting
    *   Peer coaching
    *   In-house training
    *   Others: Please state...........

8. What is your understanding of early childhood leadership? Why is leadership important in early childhood education? How can leadership skills be developed in preschool principals?
9. What, in your opinion, are the important skills a school leader should possess? Why do you believe these skills are important for school principals? Do you have an exemplary school leader in your life? What leadership skills do you admire in them?
10. Can you share your school's vision? Have there been any recent changes to your school's vision? What prompted these changes? How do you enact your school's vision with your teachers, students, and parents?
11. What are your main duties as a school principal? How do you prioritize these duties? Do you delegate management tasks to teachers?
12. How would you describe your leadership skills? What are your main strengths, and how do you leverage them to achieve your school's vision?
13. How do you think your teachers and parents would describe your leadership skills? What is one leadership attribute that you frequently hear about from your teachers and parents? What steps have you taken to enhance this attribute, and why do you believe it is important for improving your school?
14. How can school principals promote school performance and students' overall achievements?
15. What actions do you take to enhance your teachers' competencies? Do you have specific criteria for promoting these competencies?

16. Can you provide an example of an improvement you've made in the teaching and learning environment at your school? What motivated this decision, and how did you manage any associated challenges with your teachers, students, and parents?
17. What problems and challenges do you encounter as a school leader on a daily basis? How do you address these issues? Do you involve teachers in resolving them? In what ways do teachers contribute to effective problem-solving?
18. Can you share a problem or challenge you've faced with your teachers and parents? How did you handle the situation?
19. How do you approach problem-solving at your school? Do you follow a standard procedure? How do you draw on your past experiences to address current challenges?
20. What comes to mind when you think about continuous professional development? How do you feel about continuous professional development beyond your initial thoughts?
21. What continuous professional development activities have you participated in at your preschool? Did you suggest these activities, or were you directed to attend them? How do you manage your workload when attending continuous professional development?
22. Have you engaged in continuous professional development focusing on principal leadership roles and early childhood-related topics?
23. What was the most valuable continuous professional development experience you've had in the last decade?
24. How does continuous professional development help you meet your personal and career needs as a school leader? What improvements have you made in your leadership skills as a result of continuous professional development, and how have you implemented these ideas to manage teachers and maintain student achievements?
25. What areas of continuous professional development do you think are important for your teachers? How do you believe they contribute to school performance and student achievement? How do you plan to provide continuous professional development for your teachers?
26. How many lead teachers and teachers have you mentored in the last ten years? Have you participated in classroom activities with your teachers?
27. What are your thoughts on degree requirements for preschool principals? How do you think having a degree may impact school performance and student achievement in preschool settings?
28. What challenges do you face in accessing continuous professional development? Why do you think these challenges exist, and how can they be overcome?
29. What challenges do you encounter in implementing knowledge gained from continuous professional development at your school? Why do you think these challenges arise, and how can they be addressed?

In your opinion, what resources and support can encourage school principals to consistently engage in continuous professional development? How can the government assist private preschool principals in their continuous professional development? Do you believe it's fair for the government to mandate a certain number of hours of continuous professional development for preschool principals?