

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP, EDUCATOR COMMITMENT AND MOTIVATION: EFFECTS ON HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT IN KEMAS PRESCHOOLS, MALAYSIA

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Abstract. Holistic student development has become a fundamental indicator of educational quality in early childhood education because it encompasses children's cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, moral, and spiritual development. Despite increasing attention being given to holistic education in Malaysia, empirical evidence explaining how instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation contribute to holistic student development within KEMAS preschools remains limited. This study therefore examined the levels, relationships, and predictive influence of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation on holistic student development among KEMAS preschool educators in the Northern Zone of Malaysia. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed involving 313 educators selected from a population of approximately 1,700 educators across Kedah, Perak, and Pulau Pinang. Data were collected using structured questionnaires adapted from established instruments and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, and Stepwise Multiple Linear Regression using SPSS. The findings indicated that instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development were all perceived at high levels. Significant positive relationships were identified between all independent variables and holistic student development. Stepwise regression analysis further revealed that extrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by intrinsic motivation, providing incentives to students, and defining school mission and goals. Collectively, these predictors explained 42.1% of the variance in holistic student development. The findings provide empirical evidence supporting leadership enhancement, educator motivation, and evidence-based policymaking to strengthen preschool educational quality within KEMAS.

Keywords: instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, holistic student development, KEMAS preschool

Introduction

Early childhood education is universally recognised as the foundation of lifelong learning because developmental experiences during the first years of life profoundly influence children's cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, moral, and behavioural development. Research in developmental psychology consistently demonstrates that experiences acquired before the age of six significantly shape children's future academic achievement, emotional well-being, social competence, and lifelong learning capabilities. Consequently, improving educational quality during early childhood has become a strategic priority for governments and international organisations seeking to strengthen human capital and sustainable national development. International organisations, including UNESCO and UNICEF, have consistently emphasised that quality early childhood education extends beyond academic preparation by promoting children's holistic development through balanced learning experiences. Accordingly, educational systems are increasingly expected to develop children's intellectual competence, emotional resilience, physical well-being, moral values, creativity, and

collaborative skills simultaneously. This paradigm reflects the global transition from outcome-oriented education towards learner-centred approaches that prioritise comprehensive child development as the primary indicator of educational success.

Within the Malaysian context, holistic student development is explicitly embedded in the National Philosophy of Education and operationalised through the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK). These national policy frameworks emphasise balanced human development encompassing intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions. As one of the largest public providers of early childhood education, the Community Development Department (KEMAS) plays a significant role in translating these national aspirations into educational practice, particularly within rural and semi-rural communities through its nationwide network of TABIKA KEMAS centres. The effectiveness of preschool education, however, depends not only on curriculum implementation but also on organisational and psychological factors that influence educators' professional practice. Among these factors, instructional leadership has consistently been recognised as a critical determinant of teaching quality because effective instructional leaders establish clear educational goals, supervise instructional practices, support professional learning, and create positive learning environments. Simultaneously, educator commitment strengthens organisational engagement and professional responsibility, whereas educator motivation encourages educators to sustain high-quality teaching practices despite increasingly complex educational demands.

Although previous research has independently demonstrated the importance of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation, empirical studies integrating these three constructs within a single conceptual framework remain limited, particularly within Malaysian early childhood education. Furthermore, most previous investigations have concentrated primarily on academic achievement, organisational effectiveness, or teacher performance rather than holistic student development as the principal educational outcome. Consequently, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the combined contribution of organisational leadership and educators' psychological characteristics towards holistic student development in KEMAS preschools. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates the relationships and predictive influence of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation on holistic student development among KEMAS preschool educators in the Northern Zone of Malaysia. By integrating leadership, organisational commitment, motivational theory, and holistic child development within a single empirical model, the study contributes both theoretically and practically to the growing body of knowledge in early childhood education while providing evidence-based recommendations for educational leadership, professional development, and policymaking.

Review of literature

The quality of early childhood education is increasingly recognised as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by organisational leadership, educator-related factors, and children's developmental outcomes. Rather than viewing these constructs independently, contemporary educational research emphasises the interaction between leadership practices, educators' professional attitudes, and motivational processes in creating effective learning environments. Within the KEMAS preschool context,

instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation are expected to function synergistically in promoting holistic student development.

Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership remains one of the most influential leadership paradigms in educational management because it places teaching and learning at the centre of school improvement initiatives. Hallinger (2011) instructional leadership model conceptualises leadership through three interrelated functions: defining the school mission, managing instructional programmes, and promoting a positive school learning climate. Collectively, these functions enable educational leaders to establish strategic direction, improve instructional quality, and strengthen organisational capacity for continuous improvement. In preschool settings, instructional leadership extends beyond administrative supervision to encompass pedagogical coaching, curriculum monitoring, professional mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving. Preschool supervisors are expected to support educators in implementing developmentally appropriate practices while ensuring that instructional activities remain aligned with curriculum standards and children's developmental needs. Consequently, effective instructional leadership contributes not only to educator performance but also to children's learning experiences and developmental outcomes. Although numerous studies have reported positive associations between instructional leadership and school effectiveness, recent evidence suggests that leadership rarely influences student outcomes directly. Instead, leadership practices frequently operate through mediating mechanisms such as organisational climate, teacher collaboration, instructional quality, and educator motivation. This perspective highlights the importance of examining instructional leadership within a broader organisational framework rather than as an isolated predictor of educational success.

Educator commitment

Educator commitment has consistently been recognised as an essential determinant of organisational effectiveness because committed educators are more likely to demonstrate professional responsibility, sustained engagement, and organisational citizenship behaviours. Meyer and Allen (1997) Three-Component Model conceptualises commitment as comprising affective, continuance, and normative commitment, each representing different psychological motivations for remaining within an organisation. Among these dimensions, affective commitment is generally regarded as the most desirable because it reflects educators' emotional attachment to their profession and organisation. Normative commitment reflects a sense of professional obligation and moral responsibility, whereas continuance commitment is primarily associated with perceived costs of organisational withdrawal. Previous educational studies indicate that educators exhibiting stronger affective and normative commitment generally demonstrate greater instructional quality, professional collaboration, and willingness to engage in continuous professional learning. Nevertheless, empirical findings concerning the relationship between educator commitment and student outcomes remain inconsistent. Some studies report substantial positive effects, whereas others suggest that organisational commitment contributes indirectly through educator motivation, job satisfaction, and instructional effectiveness. These inconsistencies indicate that educator commitment should be examined alongside

other organisational and psychological variables to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of its contribution to educational outcomes.

Educator Motivation

Educator motivation represents one of the strongest psychological determinants of instructional performance because it influences educators' persistence, enthusiasm, creativity, and willingness to improve professional practice. Self-Determination Theory explains motivation through the fulfilment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which subsequently generate intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. Intrinsic motivation originates from educators' internal satisfaction derived from teaching and professional accomplishment, whereas extrinsic motivation reflects external influences such as recognition, organisational support, promotion opportunities, and institutional rewards. Contemporary educational research increasingly recognises that both motivational dimensions contribute positively to instructional effectiveness when organisational environments adequately support educators' professional needs. Within preschool education, motivated educators are more likely to establish supportive classroom environments, adopt innovative pedagogical approaches, and maintain positive relationships with children and families. Consequently, educator motivation is expected to function as an important mechanism through which organisational leadership translates into improved educational quality and holistic child development (Wang et al., 2015).

Holistic student development

Holistic student development constitutes the primary educational outcome of Malaysian preschool education and reflects the balanced development of children's cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, moral, and spiritual competencies. This holistic orientation aligns with the National Philosophy of Education and the National Preschool Standard Curriculum, both of which emphasise balanced human development rather than academic achievement alone. The theoretical foundation of holistic student development is supported principally by Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory and Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. Piaget explains children's intellectual development through active interaction with their environment, whereas Erikson emphasises the importance of psychosocial experiences in shaping children's confidence, initiative, and social competence. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive explanation of children's multidimensional development during the preschool years. In the present study, holistic student development is conceptualised as children's balanced progress across multiple developmental domains rather than isolated academic performance. Such an approach provides a more comprehensive indicator of preschool educational quality because it captures broader developmental outcomes that are essential for lifelong learning and future educational success (Zosh et al., 2017).

Research gap and conceptual contribution

Despite substantial scholarly attention devoted to instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation, previous studies have generally investigated these constructs independently and predominantly within primary or secondary school

settings. Relatively few empirical studies have integrated these variables within a single conceptual framework in early childhood education, particularly within Malaysian public preschool institutions. Furthermore, previous investigations have frequently employed academic achievement, organisational effectiveness, or teacher performance as dependent variables, while holistic student development has received comparatively limited empirical attention. This limitation restricts current understanding of how organisational leadership and educators' psychological characteristics collectively influence children's comprehensive developmental outcomes. Accordingly, the present study addresses this research gap by simultaneously examining instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development within the organisational context of KEMAS preschools. By integrating these constructs into a single empirical model, the study contributes theoretically by extending instructional leadership and motivational perspectives to early childhood education, while practically providing evidence that may inform leadership development, educator professional learning, and policy improvement within Malaysia's preschool education system.

Materials and Methods

Research design and population and sampling

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships and predictive influence of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation on holistic student development among KEMAS preschool educators in the Northern Zone of Malaysia. A quantitative approach was selected because it enables the systematic measurement of relationships among predefined variables and facilitates hypothesis testing through statistical analyses. The cross-sectional design was considered appropriate as it allowed data to be collected from respondents at a single point in time, thereby providing an efficient means of investigating organisational and psychological factors associated with holistic student development. The target population comprised 1,700 educators employed in KEMAS preschools located in Kedah, Perak, and Pulau Pinang, representing the Northern Zone of Malaysia. These states were selected because they constitute one of the largest administrative regions under the Community Development Department (KEMAS) and encompass diverse educational settings, including rural, semi-urban, and urban communities. The minimum sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table. Based on the population size, a minimum sample exceeding 300 respondents was considered statistically adequate. A total of 313 preschool educators participated in the study through proportionate sampling procedures, ensuring appropriate representation across the three participating states (Creswell and Creswell, 2023).

Research instrument

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire consisting of four principal constructs: instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development. Instructional leadership was measured using an adapted version of the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) developed by Hallinger (2018), covering three principal leadership functions: defining the school mission, managing instructional programmes, and promoting a

positive school learning climate. Educator commitment was measured using an instrument adapted from Meyer and Allen (1991) Three-Component Organisational Commitment Model, encompassing affective, continuance, and normative commitment. Educator motivation was assessed based on Self-Determination Theory, measuring both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Holistic student development was measured using a researcher-developed instrument based on the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK), the KEMAS Preschool Curriculum, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, and Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. The instrument evaluates children's development across cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, moral, and spiritual domains. All questionnaire items employed a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Field, 2024).

Validity and reliability and data collection procedures

The questionnaire underwent comprehensive expert validation prior to data collection to establish content validity. Experts in educational leadership, early childhood education, educational measurement, and research methodology reviewed the instrument to ensure its relevance, clarity, and appropriateness for the Malaysian preschool context. Construct validity was strengthened through the adaptation of internationally recognised measurement instruments that have been widely validated in previous educational research. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with all constructs demonstrating reliability coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability for subsequent statistical analyses. Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant authorities prior to data collection. Subsequently, questionnaires were distributed electronically through Google Forms, allowing respondents from the three participating states to complete the survey voluntarily. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study objectives, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Respondents' identities remained anonymous throughout the research process, and all collected information was used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with accepted research ethics (Martín-García and Rico-González, 2024).

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to describe respondents' demographic characteristics and determine the levels of instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development. Prior to inferential analyses, data normality was assessed using skewness and kurtosis statistics to verify compliance with the assumptions required for parametric analyses. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was subsequently performed to examine the relationships between instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development. Finally, Stepwise Multiple Linear Regression analysis was conducted to identify the combined predictive influence of instructional leadership dimensions, educator commitment dimensions, and educator motivation dimensions on holistic student development, as well as to determine the most influential predictors of holistic student development among KEMAS preschool educators.

Results and Discussion

Respondents' demographic profile

A total of 313 KEMAS preschool educators participated in this study. The respondents represented KEMAS preschools located in Kedah, Perak, and Pulau Pinang, providing adequate representation of educators across the Northern Zone of Malaysia. Most respondents were between 31 and 40 years of age, possessed a Diploma qualification, had accumulated 11 to 15 years of teaching experience, and reported receiving five or more supervisory visits annually from preschool supervisors. These demographic characteristics indicate that the respondents possessed substantial professional experience and were familiar with instructional supervision practices implemented within KEMAS preschools.

Descriptive statistics

Prior to hypothesis testing, descriptive analyses were performed to determine the levels of instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development. Normality assessment based on skewness and kurtosis statistics indicated that all study variables satisfied the assumptions required for parametric statistical analyses. *Table 1* presents the descriptive statistics for the principal study variables. Overall, all constructs recorded high mean scores, indicating favourable perceptions among respondents regarding instructional leadership practices, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development. Among the four constructs, educator commitment obtained the highest mean score ($M = 4.10$), whereas holistic student development recorded the lowest, although it remained within the high category. These findings suggest that positive organisational conditions and educator-related factors were consistently evident across participating KEMAS preschools. Further analysis of instructional leadership dimensions revealed that Defining School Mission and Goals achieved the highest mean score, whereas Protecting Instructional Time recorded the lowest mean. Nevertheless, all instructional leadership dimensions remained within the high category, reflecting consistent instructional leadership practices among preschool supervisors. Regarding educator commitment, affective commitment and normative commitment demonstrated high levels, whereas continuance commitment was moderate. For educator motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was rated highly, with extrinsic motivation recording a slightly higher mean score than intrinsic motivation. Likewise, all dimensions of holistic student development, including cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, moral-spiritual development, and twenty-first century skills; were perceived at high levels.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the main variables ($N = 313$).

Variable	Mean	SD	Level
Instructional Leadership	4.04	0.624	High
Educator Commitment	4.10	0.677	High
Educator Motivation	3.84	0.548	High
Holistic Student Development	3.81	0.530	High

Correlation analysis

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator

motivation, and holistic student development. The findings revealed that all independent variables were positively and significantly correlated with holistic student development ($p < .001$). Educator motivation demonstrated the strongest positive relationship ($r = .579$), followed by instructional leadership ($r = .483$) and educator commitment ($r = .463$). These results indicate that higher levels of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation are associated with improved holistic student development within KEMAS preschools (*Table 2*).

Table 2. Pearson correlation analysis.

Variables	r	p
Instructional Leadership → Holistic Student Development	.483	< .001
Educator Commitment → Holistic Student Development	.463	< .001
Educator Motivation → Holistic Student Development	.579	< .001

Multiple regression analysis

Stepwise Multiple Linear Regression analysis was subsequently performed to determine the combined predictive influence of instructional leadership dimensions, educator commitment dimensions, and educator motivation dimensions on holistic student development. The final regression model was statistically significant ($F = 55.964$, $p < .001$) and produced a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .649$, with $R^2 = .421$ and an Adjusted $R^2 = .413$. These findings indicate that the retained predictors collectively explained 42.1% of the variance in holistic student development, while the remaining variance may be attributed to other organisational, instructional, or contextual factors beyond the scope of this study. The final regression coefficients are presented in *Table 3*. Among the retained predictors, extrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of holistic student development, followed by intrinsic motivation. Two instructional leadership dimensions: Providing Incentives to Students and Defining School Mission and Goals; also made statistically significant contributions to the regression model. Conversely, none of the educator commitment dimensions remained significant after controlling for instructional leadership and educator motivation, indicating that their unique contribution was comparatively smaller within the final predictive model.

Table 3. Final stepwise multiple regression model.

Predictor	β	t	p
Extrinsic Motivation	.410	8.307	< .001
Intrinsic Motivation	.214	4.391	< .001
Providing Incentives to Students	.128	2.762	.006
Defining School Mission and Goals	.128	2.611	.009

The present study investigated the relationships and predictive influence of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation on holistic student development among KEMAS preschool educators in the Northern Zone of Malaysia. Overall, the findings demonstrate that instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development were all perceived at high levels. More importantly, all three independent variables were significantly associated with holistic student development, while educator motivation emerged as the most influential predictor in the final regression model. These findings collectively

suggest that children's holistic development is not solely dependent on curriculum implementation but is also shaped by organisational leadership and educators' psychological readiness. The consistently high level of instructional leadership indicates that preschool supervisors effectively fulfilled their instructional responsibilities in guiding teaching and learning processes within KEMAS preschools. In particular, the dimension Defining School Mission and Goals recorded the highest mean score and remained a significant predictor in the regression model. This finding reinforces Hallinger's instructional leadership framework, which proposes that clearly articulated organisational goals provide strategic direction for improving instructional quality and educational effectiveness. When supervisors communicate a shared educational vision and align instructional practices with organisational objectives, educators are more likely to demonstrate consistent instructional practices that ultimately support children's holistic development.

Another important finding concerns educator commitment. Although affective and normative commitment were reported at high levels, none of the commitment dimensions remained significant predictors after educator motivation and instructional leadership variables were entered into the regression model. This result should not be interpreted as indicating that educator commitment is unimportant. Rather, it suggests that commitment may exert its influence indirectly through other organisational and psychological mechanisms. Educators who demonstrate strong emotional attachment and professional responsibility may still require adequate motivational support and effective instructional leadership before such commitment is translated into classroom practices capable of enhancing children's developmental outcomes. This interpretation highlights the interdependence of organisational commitment, leadership, and motivation within educational organisations. The most significant contribution of the present study lies in the finding that educator motivation, particularly extrinsic motivation, constituted the strongest predictor of holistic student development. This finding extends current understanding of educator motivation within Malaysian preschool education by demonstrating that external motivational resources including supervisory recognition, organisational appreciation, professional support, and opportunities for career development remain powerful determinants of educators' professional performance. While Self-Determination Theory frequently emphasises the long-term benefits of intrinsic motivation, the present findings indicate that, within KEMAS preschools, external organisational support plays an equally important role in sustaining educators' professional engagement and effectiveness. Consequently, organisational policies designed to strengthen educator motivation should integrate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies rather than prioritising one dimension exclusively.

The regression analysis further demonstrated that two instructional leadership dimensions Providing Incentives to Students and Defining School Mission and Goals remained significant predictors of holistic student development. These findings suggest that leadership practices directly connected with classroom learning and student engagement exert greater influence on children's development than general administrative responsibilities. Preschool supervisors who actively recognise children's achievements, encourage positive learning behaviours, and consistently communicate instructional expectations create educational environments that facilitate educators' professional performance while simultaneously promoting children's cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, moral, and spiritual development. This evidence reinforces the

argument that instructional leadership functions as a pedagogically oriented leadership approach rather than merely an administrative management strategy. Collectively, the findings contribute to the growing literature by integrating instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development within a single empirical framework. Previous studies have generally investigated these constructs separately or have concentrated primarily on primary and secondary education contexts. By focusing on KEMAS preschools, the present study provides empirical evidence from a national early childhood education system that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention. The study therefore extends instructional leadership theory into preschool education while simultaneously demonstrating that educator motivation functions as the primary organisational mechanism linking leadership practices with children's holistic developmental outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the findings have important implications for educational policy and professional practice. Leadership development programmes for preschool supervisors should strengthen competencies related to instructional supervision, professional coaching, and strategic goal setting. Simultaneously, organisational initiatives aimed at improving educator motivation should incorporate systematic recognition, continuous professional learning opportunities, supportive supervision, and mechanisms that acknowledge educators' professional contributions. Strengthening these organisational conditions is expected to enhance not only educators' professional effectiveness but also the quality of holistic student development across KEMAS preschools.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationships and predictive influence of instructional leadership, educator commitment, and educator motivation on holistic student development among KEMAS preschool educators in the Northern Zone of Malaysia. The findings confirmed that all study variables were perceived at high levels and that each independent variable demonstrated a significant positive relationship with holistic student development. Stepwise Multiple Linear Regression further identified extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, providing incentives to students, and defining school mission and goals as the most significant predictors, collectively explaining 42.1% of the variance in holistic student development. The study contributes theoretically by extending instructional leadership, organisational commitment, and Self-Determination Theory within the context of Malaysian early childhood education. It further demonstrates that educator motivation represents the most influential organisational mechanism supporting holistic student development. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that strengthening instructional leadership competencies together with systematic motivational support for educators may substantially improve preschool educational quality and children's comprehensive developmental outcomes within KEMAS. Despite these contributions, the study was limited to KEMAS preschools in the Northern Zone of Malaysia and employed a cross-sectional research design. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, broader geographical coverage, and more advanced analytical approaches, such as Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), to examine potential mediating and moderating mechanisms among instructional leadership, educator commitment, educator motivation, and holistic student development. In conclusion, the present study provides empirical evidence that effective

instructional leadership and highly motivated educators constitute essential organisational resources for achieving holistic student development. Strengthening these organisational capabilities will contribute not only to improving preschool educational quality but also to supporting Malaysia's broader aspiration of developing balanced, competent, and resilient future generations.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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