7-7-2020

Keeping Teachers Afloat with Instructional Coaching: Coaching Structure and Implementation

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Abstract

Despite the press for instructional coaching as a form of effective teacher professional development (TPD), there is still a need to understand what instructional coaching is and how its operations look like. Meanwhile, the coaching literature provides scant guidance particularly about the coaching implementation in the Malaysian context. For the purpose of this study, we explored the processes of instructional coaching in Sarawak, particularly focusing on conceptualising the coaching processes to fine-tune teaching practice. Employing a qualitative case study design, we conducted non-participant observations on coaching conferences of four coach-teacher pairs on a one-to-one basis. We analysed the data obtained using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The findings suggested that the coaching cycle consisted of three stages: pre-observation conference, classroom observation and post-observation conference. An additional stage of intervention was identified in the coaching cycle. Coaching support to the teachers was provided on an average of one session per month. Structuring coaching conversations was a key aspect in conducting coaching support for the teachers. For future research, we offer recommendations of larger-scale studies to discover the impact of instructional coaches that include the intervention component as a part of the coaching cycle to enhance teacher instruction and student achievement. We would also suggest studies based on comprehensive theories and empirical evidences into the development of fully articulated models of instructional coaching related to the Malaysian context.

Keywords

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Keeping Teachers Afloat with Instructional Coaching: Coaching Structure and Implementation

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Despite the press for instructional coaching as a form of effective teacher professional development (TPD), there is still a need to understand what instructional coaching is and how its operations look like. Meanwhile, the coaching literature provides scant guidance particularly about the coaching implementation in the Malaysian context. For the purpose of this study, we explored the processes of instructional coaching in Sarawak, particularly focusing on conceptualising the coaching processes to fine-tune teaching practice. Employing a qualitative case study design, we conducted non-participant observations on coaching conferences of four coach-teacher pairs on a one-to-one basis. We analysed the data obtained using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The findings suggested that the coaching cycle consisted of three stages: pre-observation conference, classroom observation and post-observation conference. An additional stage of intervention was identified in the coaching cycle. Coaching support to the teachers was provided on an average of one session per month. Structuring coaching conversations was a key aspect in conducting coaching support for the teachers. For future research, we offer recommendations of larger-scale studies to discover the impact of instructional coaches that include the intervention component as a part of the coaching cycle to enhance teacher instruction and student achievement. We would also suggest studies based on comprehensive theories and empirical evidences into the development of fully articulated models of instructional coaching related to the Malaysian context. Keywords: Instructional Coaching, Teacher Education and Professional Development, Qualitative Research, Teacher Professional Development, TESOL, Elementary Education and Teaching, In-service Teacher Training, Coaching and Mentoring in Education

Introduction

As a nation-wide implementation for teacher professional development (TPD) to enhance teacher practice leading to school improvement, instructional coaching is rapidly gaining interests in many countries (Gibbons & Cobb, 2017; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015). Malaysia has also incorporated coaching into its effort in providing quality TPD activities to teachers, through which the coaching programme is introduced to schools throughout Malaysia (MOE, 2012). Indeed, a growing body of literature underscores

the supportive characteristic of instructional coaching leading to improvement in both teachers' practice and student achievement (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009; Kane & Rosenquist, 2019; Teemant, Wink, & Tyra, 2011). The type of support that instructional coaches provides is mainly job-embedded, personalised and sustained professional learning support for teachers through the coach-teacher partnership (Desimone & Pak, 2017; Knight, 2007; Zepeda, 2008). In mind to maximise teacher learning, instructional coaches employ effective communication strategies such as effective listening and dialogical questioning with the goal of building relationship with the teachers (Knight & Nieuwerburgh, 2012).

There are considerable differences and arguments put forward in terms of the coaching frameworks and purposes as a type of professional development. Some of the examples include executive coaching (Hauser, 2014; Passmore, 2010), literacy coaching (Ippolito, 2010; Matsumura, Garnier, & Spybrook, 2013), cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2016) and instructional coaching (Desimone & Pak, 2017). To clarify, instructional coaches place themselves with in-service teachers to provide support and guidance in improving instructional practices. Instructional coaching could be distinguished from mentoring pre-service teachers by experienced teachers (Hoffman et al., 2015; Vikaraman, Mansor, & Hamzah, 2017), peer coaching between in-service teachers and mentoring of teacher trainees by lecturers in higher institutions.

There is growing empirical evidence that instructional coaching could bring about many benefits in school improvement efforts by improving: (a) teacher efficacy (Cantrell & Hughes, 2008; Joyce & Showers, 2002); (b) fidelity in implementing teaching strategies (Piper & Zuilkowski, 2015; Snyder, Hemmeter, & Fox, 2015); and (c) student achievement (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermelon, & Zigmond, 2010; Kraft et al., 2018; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). When coaching integrates with the presentation of theory, demonstration, and practice, teacher efficacy could be increased as much more of the teachers' learning could be transferred into classroom practices, in contrast to the traditional TPD activities which do not incorporate coaching (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Further, Cantrell and Hughes (2008) contended that for coaching to bring about positive changes in teacher efficacy that could influence student achievement, the coaching collaboration should be supportive of the teachers' professional learning in a continuous and on-going collaboration. Coaches, in conducting the coaching processes, go through a sequence of planning and implementing teaching strategies with the teachers (Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). Yet, very little study is conducted in exploring the purpose and structure of coaching activities within the coaching processes. Bean et al. (2010) is one of the few studies which investigates how coaches distribute their time in the coaching processes. The study uncovers that many of the coaching activities are implemented just as a meaningless routine. Therefore, this logically leads to the aim of this study which was to carefully study the coaching processes to provide ways to plan the coaching processes more purposefully.

Background of the Study: Coaching in Malaysia

The present study concentrates on in-service TPD in Sarawak. In general, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) has invested in their continuous endeavour in producing highly-skilled and good quality teachers, as highlighted in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (MOE, 2012). One of the eleven shifts in delivering the education reform is to transform teaching into the profession of choice by providing teachers with the best in-service training available. Despite MOE's attempt in improving qualifications, providing higher salary and better career path seem to fall short in producing quality educators (Mansor, Fisher, Rasul, Ibrahim, & Yusoff, 2012). According to a study by the Higher Education Leadership Malaysia (AKEPT, 2011), 50% of classroom lessons were delivered unsatisfactorily by failing to engage students as the lesson were mostly passive, lecture format of content delivery and unable to

include to higher-order thinking skills. High quality in-service professional development that is job-embedded, goal-oriented, non-evaluative and that could cater to the teachers' individual learning needs was almost non-existent (Desimone & Pak, 2017). In addition, a much promising form of in-service teacher training, called the Buddy Support System was just at the mediocre level in terms of its impact of implementation and effectiveness in improving teacher practice (Abdullah, Alzaidiyeen, & Saedee, 2010).

The MOE's latest initiative to provide teachers with high quality in-service training is fulfilled through the introduction of instructional coaches or the School Improvement Specialist Coaches Plus (SISC+) in Malaysian primary and secondary schools through the District Transformation Programme (DTP) (School Management Division, 2015). There were more than 450 SISC+ with an initial focus on Bahasa Malaysia, English Language and Mathematics being deployed by January 2013 to support the pilot project of DTP in Kedah and Sabah states in Malaysia. These coaches were appointed among various experts in the education field within the Malaysian education system, such as the Excellent Teachers (Guru Cemerlang), Excellent School Leaders (Pengetua Cemerlang), Aminuddin Baki Institute (IAB) or teaching college lecturers, existing literacy coaches (FasiLINUS), and state education offices (JPN) and PPD officers. By 2014, the Malaysian coaching programme was introduced to the rest of the states in Malaysia.

Instructional coaching programmes are implemented in schools based on the DTP 3.0 Management Guideline (School Management Division, 2017). The SISC+, or hereafter refers to the coaches in this article, aims to provide teacher support related to pedagogy, assessment and curriculum across all subjects (Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2016). In terms of the responsibilities of the coaches, the DTP 3.0 Management Guideline lists out the four main areas of responsibilities in percentages as follows: (a) 60% of face-to-face coaching and discussions; (b) 20% of TPD and professional learning (PLC) activities; (c) 15% of post-mortem reports and teacher intervention planning; and (d) 5% of administrative work (School Management Division, 2017). Coaches provides support to teachers from under-performing schools. In 2017, MOE reviewed the role of the coaches as subject-based pedagogical coaches (Malay Language, English Language and Mathematics) to pedagogical experts for all subjects (Ministry of Education Annual Report, 2016).

Meanwhile in 2019, there was, for a second time, changes in how coaching programmes should be operated (MOE, 2019). Coaching support will be focusing on teachers who are head of subjects or head of departments in schools. The new operative instructions for the coaches have yet to specify the number of teachers to be coached per coach and the frequency or dosage of coaching support provided by the coaches at a minimal level. The constant changes in the operations of instructional coaching in the context of Malaysia have posed great challenges to the coaches in providing teacher support that is closely adhering to the latest coaching decisions and instructions by the MOE. Although official coaching guidelines are established as a reference to how the coaching processes should be conducted, the MOE's vision and expectations might not be accurately translated into practice. Coveney, Ganster, Hartlen, and King (2003) described this disparity in vision and execution as the "strategy gap." The "strategy gap" asserts the importance of researching into the implementation of plans to ensure adherence of the actual implementations to the intended focus, goals, activities and methods of delivery of the plans. Therefore, it would be imperative for conducting an investigation of the actual day-to-day practice on how instructional coaching could function and match with the expected coaching processes as mandated by the MOE.

The research by Mohamad, Rashid, Yunus, and Zaid (2016) is regarded as one of the limited studies on the coaching programme in Malaysia that shed some light on the coaches' views on their experiences in coaching teachers. Although identifying perspectives of the stakeholders in coaching would be valuable, we argue that it is equally important to attend to

exploration on the coaches' work in supporting teachers in the coaching processes. For example, Anderson, Feldman, and Minstrell (2014) and Snyder et al. (2015) asserted the importance of identifying the dose of coaching provided to understand the fidelity of the coaching interventions. In a similar vein, Piper and Zuilkowski (2015), researched on the most effective ratios of coaches to teachers in the context of Kenya. To enhance the pedagogical support that instructional coaches could provide to teachers, it requires more studies into understanding the current practices in coaching and how coaching functions to offer ongoing instructional guidance accordingly.

Literature Review

Sociocultural Theory and Zone of Proximal Development

The process of instructional coaching, in which the coaches play the mediational role to support the teachers in enhancing their teaching practices, builds upon the sociocultural theory put forth by Vygotsky (Teemant, 2014; Teemant et al., 2011). The sociocultural theory emphasises the role of social interaction in learning because it is through dialogue that coaches, acting as the more knowledgeable others, could provide scaffolding to teacher learning within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Collet, 2015). The type of scaffold for learning development could be presented in the form of questioning, demonstrating or providing feedback. ZPD epitomises the difference between the region of activity that learners could navigate with aid from a supporting context and without any assistance from a more knowledgeable other (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011; Thompson, 2013). In the one-to-one instructional coaching context, the coach identifies the actual development of the teacher, communicates with the teacher to determine the teacher's experience and identifies the mutually-agreed areas to be coached. In the ZPD, the coach and the teacher as the learner could collaborate on a task that the teacher could not perform independently due to unfamiliarity with a new knowledge of teaching strategy. Gradually, as the teacher gains confidence and experience in the use of the new knowledge, the teacher will be able to perform the same task without support from the coach.

The Processes of Coaching

Instructional coaching provides educators with a form of high-quality TPD as it shares the characteristics of effective professional development (Desimone, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Instructional coaching evolves away from traditional top-down TPD by humanising training in terms of providing individualised support and guidance to teachers. The characteristics of high-quality TPD such as providing on-going activities tailored to the teachers' specific needs in improving teaching practices are translated into the coaching processes. According to the coaching literature, the coaching processes are usually a three-stage cycle which constitutes of pre-conference, lesson observation and post-conference (Teemant, 2014). Other coaching models might name the stages differently, but they do share similarities in how each of the stages function (Knight et al., 2015; Snyder et al., 2015; Teemant, 2014).

A pre-conference is the first stage in the coaching cycle whereby the coaches and teachers meet to establish shared goals and planning through the coaching interaction (Teemant, 2014). In this stage, the coaches gather the needs, goals and lesson plans from the teachers to understand the teachers' current practices and priorities for enhancement before entering the teachers' classes for observations (Bean et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2015; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). Based on the teachers' prepared lesson plans, the coaches discuss the lesson

objectives, central terms, theories, models, visual aids, and other materials employed by the teachers in their planning (Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). The main purpose of the discussion is to allow the crucial process of co-construction of understanding between the coaches and teachers in the implementation of the lessons to take place. The average time spent in pre-conference is estimated at 30 minutes (Teemant, 2014; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). Teemant et al. (2011) asserted that the use of pre-observation instructional conversations between the coaches and teacher allow theoretical and practical knowledge to inform both parties in the meaningful context of the teachers' classroom settings. Although the coaching literature stresses the pivotal stage of pre-conference, Bean et al. (2010) revealed that no pre-conference was conducted when the coaches in their study were providing coaching support to their teachers. Similarly, Vogt and Rogalla (2009) reported that coaches spent less time with pre-lesson reflection. The inconsistency in supporting teachers through implementing pre-conference discussions could be detrimental to the effectiveness of the coaching processes as the contact hours for coaching support would be greatly decreased. Teachers might miss out valuable coaching hours to discuss about their teaching practices with their coaches if pre-conferences are not included in the coaching processes. This further warrant the need to explore the coaching processes in the actual practice.

During classroom observations, coaches conduct observations of the teachers' lesson delivery based on the discussed lesson plans in the pre-conferences (Teemant et al., 2011). Similar to what Snyder et al. (2015) described as "focused observation" or Knight et al. (2015) portrayed as the "identify" stage, coaches use classroom observations to identify and collect the necessary data on the teachers' practice and the students' performance and responses in the lessons. The purpose of classroom observation is to provide teachers with the coaches' feedback in post-observation discussions (Kane & Rosequist, 2019; Knight & van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). Despite the value of classroom observations on teachers' instruction, coaches were reported not practising classroom observations (Bean et al., 2010; Coggins, Stoddard, & Cutler, 2003). Although these authors did not investigate into the reasons behind the under-utilised coaching stage of classroom observations, it could be reasoned that the classroom observations are viewed to have teaching evaluation and appraisal connotations (Lima & Silva, 2018).

In post-conferences, the coaches and teachers engage in joint reflective discussion to address practice-implementation issues to improve teaching practices (Snyder et al., 2015). This step in the coaching processes is referred to in the coaching literature as the "reflection and feedback" stage (Snyder et al., 2015) or the "improve" step (Knight et al., 2015). This stage helps both the coaches and teachers identify the improvement in the teaching practices and student outcomes in accordance to the observed lessons and specific students' performances (Bean et al., 2010).

The coaching processes could be continued cyclically after the teacher has reached the intended goals by setting another goal or discontinue the coaching cycle. If the teacher has not met the goals, the cycle will be continued by identifying other changes to be made in the teaching practice or strategy. The teachers would be expected to integrate the coaches' feedback from one observation to the next (Jacobs, Boardman, Potvin, & Chao, 2017). However, these questions remain: (a) What would be the next step if fidelity in integrating changes in the classroom practice is lacking after going through the coaching processes? (b) How do the specific coaching activities within each of the stages—pre-conference, observation and post-observation conceptualise to cater to the differing purposes in each of the coaching stage? In large-scale studies such as meta-analysis that investigate coaching (e.g., Kraft et al., 2016; Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010), there is little in-depth explanation on coaching processes, especially on what coaching activities are involved in pre-conference, observation and post-conference. For instructional coaching to be a form of high-quality instructional

support that could be effective towards school improvement efforts, it would be imperative to scrutinise the technical aspects of coaching operations. Kane and Rosenquist (2019) suggested that in the effort of conceptualising the coaches' work, the coaching activities involved in each of the stage should be designed and structured to accomplish the myriad purposes and expectations of each coaching stage.

Our team of researchers is formed by three collaborating researchers from different universities with the common research interest of developing the capacity of English teachers. We have collaborated previously in the Reading Evaluation and Decoding System (READS) project under School of Educational Studies, University Sains Malaysia. As a team of researchers, our current topic of interest revolves around instructional coaching as a form of effective in-service professional development for teachers. As the coaching literature contends that most coaching theories and models are established according to studies in Western countries, particularly from America and Europe, the application of coaching principles and how it functions in the local context must be explored. Issues regarding the implementation process should be detailed and interpreted through local lenses (Walker & Hallinger, 2007). Through our present collaboration, we hope to extend the instructional coaching literature particularly in understanding how coaching is carried out in the Malaysian context. Teachers are at the core of student learning and, indeed, effective in-service teacher training offer solutions to improve ailing teaching practices to raise student achievement in a sustainable way. We firmly believe in developing a substantial coaching model based on the aspirations of the MOE and the TPD needs of teachers as one pivotal step to ensure the effectiveness of instructional coaching implementation and to make high-quality TPD available to all Malaysian teachers.

Methodology

Research Design

According to Yin (2018), a case study research is conducted to explain some contemporary circumstances, for example, "how" and "why" some social phenomenon works. The present qualitative study made use of the case study research as it intends to provide an in-depth explanation on the processes involved in conducting instructional coaching support to primary school teachers. To do this, we collected data through observations on the actual coaching sessions conducted by the coaches for the teachers followed by semi-structured interviews. This study was part of a larger study which explored the nuances of partnership building between coaches and teachers. Given the gap in the coaching literature about the structure of instructional support in our local context, particularly in Sarawak, East Malaysia, we proposed the following three research questions:

1. What are the stages in the coaching processes and the purposes of conducting these stages?
2. What is the duration of the coaching support?
3. How are the coaching processes structured?

Respondents

Four coaching dyads which consisted of four teachers and four coaches voluntarily participated in this study (Table 1). The four teachers had teaching experience of two years and above, teaching English subject in four different primary schools in Sarawak, East Malaysia.

They were currently under the SISC+ coaching programme. They were ethnically diverse (1 Malay, 1 Chinese, and 2 Ibans).

Table 1. Demographic Data for the Respondents

Dyad	Teacher	Years of Teaching Experience	Ethnicity	Coach	Years of Coaching Experience	Years of Teaching Experience	Ethnicity	Type of School
1	Lisa*	11 years	Iban	Cassie*	4 years	9 years	Iban	Rural
2	Victor*	8 years	Chinese	Macy*	3 years	29 years	Melanau	Urban
3	John*	2 years	Iban	Edwin*	4 years	6 years	Bidayuh	Rural
4	Helen*	13 years	Malay	Della*	3 years	9 years	Iban	Suburban

*Note: All names appear in pseudonyms.

The four coaches were seasoned coaches with at least three years coaching experience and six years and above of teaching experience in the English subject. They worked under various District Education Offices in Sarawak. Each of the coach had attended coaching trainings for the basic induction courses and were government-certified full-time coaches. The coaches consisted of one Bidayuh, two Ibans and one Melanau.

Instruments

To collect the necessary data, we employed the methods of observations on the coaching processes and interviews on both the coaches and teachers. During the coaching observations, two instruments assisted our data collection process: (a) coaching observation protocol and the researcher's fieldnotes. For the interviews, we employed the coach and teacher interview protocols to conduct interviews on all the respondents in this study.

To develop the instruments for this present study, we went through several phases. First, we reviewed the related literature on instructional coaching, such as: (a) coaching models and (b) coaching structures. We then developed the instruments and sought expert advice for the research instruments. We conducted the pilot study using the developed instruments to trial run the data instruments used and to test the research procedures. The pilot study was conducted in one of the schools in Sarawak not involved in the main study prior to the actual study. We checked and corrected the research instruments to ensure the respondents' understanding of the instructions, questions and terminologies used in the research. The comments and corrections to be taken into considerations to improvise the instruments were carefully noted down. The refinement of the coaching observation protocol and the coach and teacher interview protocols involved addition of more appropriate question items and prompts while omitting redundant items.

Based on the results from the pilot study, we refined and improved the instruments. The instruments went through the second round of subject experts' validation. The validated instruments were used in the current study. We did not include the data collected from the pilot study in the present study. The data was analysed for themes or patterns using the QSR NVivo data management programme NVivo12.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection period of the study spanned a duration of 12 months. For the coaching session observations, video and audio recordings of the coaching processes were carried out. We carefully observed how coaching support was carried out and the coaching interactions of the coaching dyads during the coaching observations. We made use of the

observation protocol to guide our observations. We took on the non-participant observer role during the coaching observations. We made observation fieldnotes based on our observations to jot down notes and interesting findings regarding the coaching support. We carried out at least three coaching cycles of coaching observations for each of the dyads, with a maximum number of five coaching cycles and an average of four coaching cycles was achieved. We determined the number of coaching observations and discontinued the observations in the data collection process based on data saturation. Data saturation would be reached when the researcher finds no additional data which would suggest that adequate sampling and data has been achieved (Saunders et al., 2018).

The coach and teacher interviews were conducted after the final coaching observations. The average duration of the interviews was one hour. We employed the researcher-designed coach and teacher interview protocols during the coach and teacher interviews. Creswell (2012) asserted that the use of interview protocol is imperative to structure and make necessary notes in interviews. Both interview protocols for the coach and the teacher consisted of 18 semi-structured interview items that were developed to answer the research questions of the study. The coaches and teachers were interviewed individually. We used probes and sub-questions under each interview items to elicit more information. All interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device and a smartphone as a backup recording method.

Data Analysis

We applied the thematic analysis method to analyse the yielded data because of its highly flexible and accessible approach in processing complex amount of data (Nowell, Morris, White, & Moules, 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2013), thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method to identify and analyse patterns. This study adhered to the six steps of thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) closely.

In the first phase of familiarising with the data, we manually transcribed all the collected data to develop a more thorough understanding of the data. We imported the data into Nvivo12 Pro to organise and analyse the data from all sources. We read through the data to familiarise with the data and generate a general picture of the study.

In phase two, using NVivo12 Plus, one of the main researchers conducted thematic analysis on the data by creating codes from the raw data. To do this, data collected from the one coach-teacher dyad was analysed to further understand what activities entailed in the coaching process. Selections of excerpts of text within each data item were tagged and named utilising NVivo12 Plus. At this stage, some of the initial codes were identified through the review of the literature while the rest of the codes developed in an emergent way from the data (Boyatzis, 1998). Data relevant to each code were collated to generate an initial list of codes. This list of codes was further improved through collapsing, splitting, and discarding redundant codes. Notes and ideas were marked for coding using the memo feature in Nvivo12 Plus to prepare for phase 2 of the analysis. The other researchers counter-checked the coded data.

In phase three, we used the generated codes to identify potential themes by analysing the codes and combining the related codes. For example, the initial codes of "pre-discussion," "checking lesson plan," "understanding lesson objective" were generated based on the raw data. These initial codes were then reviewed, and the codes were collapsed. The theme "pre-observation conference" were developed based on these initial codes after the analysis process evolved through reading and rereading the data. In the formation of themes and subthemes, some initial codes form the main themes while others form the subthemes. Some of the initial codes which were redundant would be discarded and the rest would be housed temporarily into "miscellaneous."

We proceeded with reviewing the developed themes in phase four of the analysis. The excerpts for each theme and subtheme were carefully read to ensure their coherence. We reviewed themes which did not have enough data to support them while some theme could form two separate themes from one theme.

At the fifth phase, we defined each theme and determined the relationship among these themes. How each theme could explain about the data and how they could relate to the research questions were identified. At this point, data analysis for the rest of the coaching dyads were carried out by repeating the steps from phase one to phase five based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) guideline to conduct the thematic analysis.

Finally, we presented a report based on the findings of the data using analytic narrative and data extracts. Our overall analysis has led to development of three main themes: (a) coaching cycle; (b) duration of coaching support; and (c) structure of coaching process. Using the developed themes, we answered the research questions pertinent to the main objective of our study which was to examine the coaching processes.

Institutional Authorisation

The Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD) reviewed this research proposal prior to the commencement of the study to ensure this inquiry was ethical and respectful. The review ensured that the present research focused on the aim and objectives that it was intended for, thereby causing no apparent harm to the respondents in this research.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations that we employed in this study include giving informed consent, seeking voluntary participation, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, and assessing only the relevant components related to this study. We gathered informed consent from the potential research respondents prior to the data gathering stage by signing a participant consent form and a letter of consent to be video-recorded and for the researcher to use the recorded materials in the current study. We sent recruitment letters to the coaches and school heads involved in the instructional coaching programmes to inform and gain their permission. After identifying the potential teachers to be selected in the research, the recruitment letters were sent to them to request for their voluntary participation in the study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is at the centre of this study and methodological decisions are determined based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. We ensure that the qualitative results could reflect closely the respondents' voice rather than the researchers' perceptions or biases (Polit & Beck, 2012) by following the trustworthiness criteria in conducting the present research.

From the perspective of establishing credibility, prolonged engagement, and persistent observations with the samples of the study in our data collection process were ensured. The research findings were validated through method triangulation of data, whereby multiple methods of data collection were employed, such as coaching observations, coach and teacher interviews and analysis on the documents used during coaching. Rigour of the study was also maintained through data source triangulation (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) as we collected data from four different coaching dyads. The data source triangulation helped in gaining an in-depth understanding of the coaching processes. We also followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations in conducting member checking to test

the findings and interpretations with the respondents to operationalise credibility in the present study. Member checking was also conducted by asking all four dyads in this study to check whether the results have resonance with the respondents' experience in this research. All respondents reassured the accuracy of the report through emails.

The present study does not intend to generalise its findings; however, we provide thick descriptions of the findings to enhance its transferability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), other researchers who seek to transfer the results to their own site can make well-informed judgement on transferability.

Dependability was particularly followed by ensuring the research process is logical and clearly documented, which could be traced through the data analysis process and the coding matrix. All the raw data, transcripts, fieldnotes and documents were recorded systematically as means of creating clear audit trail (Koch, 1994).

To add to the conformability of the findings, we constantly referred to the transcripts and digitally-recorded observations and interviews to review the data to ensure that the abstraction process was completed and revised unnecessary or overlapping categories. At the reporting phase, we conducted interrater reliability procedure to ascertain the reproducibility and consistency of the findings (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). Cohen's kappa was tabulated based on the validation of two raters' level of chance agreement towards the coding of the data. The result indicated the Cohen's kappa value of .75 (K = .75) could be interpreted as having a substantial level of agreement. A Cohen's kappa coefficient of .60–.79 would suggest qualifying for a "moderate" score (McHugh, 2012). Therefore, the results of the Cohen's Kappa would indicate adequate agreement among the two raters and confidence should be placed in the study results.

Findings

The results of this study were based on the thematic analysis process, which would be reported systematically in accordance to the three research questions.

Theme 1: The Coaching Cycle

To answer research question one, we sought to understand the coaching processes as being practiced in the day-to-day coaching work of instructional coaches in Sarawak. We coded the findings related to the coaching processes into one main theme of coaching cycle. The findings of this study will be presented in the following subthemes: (a) pre-observation conference; (b) classroom observation; (c) post-observation conference; and (d) intervention. The findings revealed that the coaching processes were carried out in an on-going cycle as the coaches engaged teachers in discussing, goal-planning and reflecting on their teaching practices. In this study, the coaching cycle was observed to be conducted through three stages: pre-observation conference, classroom observation, post-observation conference. Upon completion of one coaching cycle, the coaches and teachers could choose whether to proceed with another round of coaching cycle or to carry out an intervention. The coaching cycle is depicted in Figure 1.
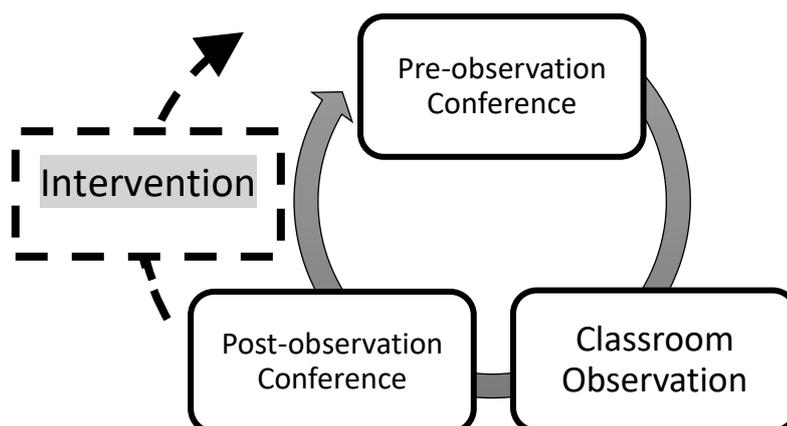
Figure 1. The three stages of coaching cycle and intervention

Pre-observation Conference. The coaches and teachers in this sample were observed to be engaged in the first step in the coaching processes, which was the pre-observation conference. All the coaches and teachers scheduled the necessary appointments with each other and met up in the teachers' respective schools when the teachers were having free periods before or after their lessons. The purpose of the pre-observation conference was to conduct lesson planning discussion, as noted in the researcher's fieldnote:

> […] discuss the lesson plan(s)…for the lesson observation (which would be conducted) later in the day" (Line 2-3, CF4 Pre, Lisa & Cassie)

To guide the pre-observation discussions, the coach respondents referred to the teachers' lesson plans which they had planned prior to the lessons. For example, John explained that during a pre-observation conference, his coach Edwin would use John's lesson plan as a point for discussion to understand the topic, content and activities employed in John's lesson. As John described in the teacher interview:

> John: […] ok he will refer to my lesson plan […] before my class also (he) started (to) refer to my lesson plan as well. Ok what are you going to do today? Ok I will show the lesson plan la. Ok I'm going to do this this this yeah. Ok you put Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) inside or not. Yeah. (Line 243-254, Teacher Interview, John)

The coaches' intention in referring to the teachers' lesson plans during the discussions was to understand the teachers' learning trajectory for their planned lessons. This would include the teachers' description of the course of their instructions such as the learning standards with reference to the English subject curriculum, learning focus, learning objectives and activities. For example, Cassie attended to Lisa's planning by looking at the details of Lisa's lesson plan. When necessary, Cassie provided her advice in refining the lesson plan, as reflected in a researcher's fieldnote:

> Cassie checked Lisa's lesson plan on its relevance to the content standard, objectives and the steps or activities. Cassie took time to explain how a lesson plan should be planned even though this is just a pre-conference. (Line 29-32, Co1 Pre, Lisa & Cassie)

Although the coach respondents were discussing about the teachers' lesson plans and at times commenting and suggesting opportunities to refine the teachers' lesson plans, they were careful not to impose expectations and directives towards achieving a perfect lesson plan. The coaches did not demand revised lesson plans based on the results of the coach-teacher discussions during the pre-observation conferences. This was portrayed by Macy:

> Macy: […] So what are the things that you need to do you just you know plan it like Year 2…Year 4 (list it out) …Year 5 you plan that out. I won't interrupt your planning. As long as it goes hand-in-hand with the syllabus. The syllabus there are only four skills. So I won't interrupt with what you have planned I will just see how with your planning. (Line 81, Co1 Pre, Victor & Macy)

Along the same vein, Della did not request Helen to change what was already planned. Della insisted:

> Della: You just plan what you need to do. Don't worry [...] It's in your plan…so I have no problem with that. Don't worry […] (Line 145, Co2 Pre, Helen & Della)

After a pre-observation conference, the classroom observation would be subsequently conducted by the coaches on the teachers' lessons. Logically, it would not be advised to request the teachers to change their lesson plans in accordance to the coaches' expectations as this would disrupt the flow of delivery of the teachers' lessons.

The pre-observation conversation included the coaches' clarifying questions or probing questions about the teachers' upcoming lessons. An example of these questions "what is your topic today?" to probe teachers' sharing of their planning for the upcoming lessons to be observed (Line 29-32, Co1 Pre, Lisa, & Cassie).

Besides understanding the teachers' planning for their observed lessons, the pre-observation conference was also geared to help the teacher identify issues and concerns faced in their teaching practices. Macy was observed to inquire about the difficulties faced by Victor's students in terms of their skill of writing. Victor recognised that the issue of teaching writing to his Year 4 students was on organising ideas and shared how he worked on finding solutions to address this issue with Macy. This was observed during one of the pre-observation conferences between Victor and Macy:

> Macy: [...] what are the problems that your student faced all these while? When it comes to writing? Especially writing?
> Victor: They don't know how to organise yes. [...] ah format. Of course, some guidelines…some phrases…the format is there [...] (Line 98-110, Co5 Pre, Victor & Macy)

The pre-observation conferences, apart from lesson plan discussions, also revolved around classroom and school-related discussions which focused on teaching strategies, students' achievement, English panel and school heads, and also HIP (Highly-immersive Programme) English language activities. For example, Cassie provided professional support on HIP activities during one of the pre-observation conferences with Lisa. HIP is a programme introduced through the Malaysian Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2015 under the To Uphold Malay Language and Strengthen the Command of English (MBMMBI) policy, in Malaysia's effort to improve the English proficiency of students by increasing the exposure of English in the school settings (Fui, 2017). Cassie summarised the agendas in one of the conferences:

Cassie: We will start today's discussion with two agendas one is on HIP the other one would be on lesson your lesson plan. (Line 1, Co2 Pre, Lisa & Cassie)

Lisa was observed to be explaining the HIP activities for her school:

Lisa: […] actually we plan for four main activities (namely) on-going activities…fun activities, real-life application ah this one […] (Line 12, Co2 Pre, Lisa & Cassie)

The pre-observation conferences allowed the coaches and teachers to develop consensus about what to expect during the teachers' classroom delivery in relation to the planned lessons and also the teachers' intended planning on English activities in the schools. With this consensus, the coaches and teachers could share ideas to build coherent learning objectives, outcomes and activities to achieve those outcomes on the lessons that would be observed.

Classroom Observation. All the four dyads conducted classroom observation of the teachers' lesson in the classroom. The observed lessons usually consisted of one-hour lessons whereby the teachers taught one of the modules that integrated the language skills – listening and speaking, reading, writing, language arts and grammar. The coach respondents enacted the observer role on the teacher's instructional practice to collect the necessary data from the observed lessons which could be used as evidence for post-observation discussions. As John explained:

John: […] he observed the pupils first. He usually does the observation. Observe and then for the second coaching he usually observes and sees the pupils' ability la. How (the students) answer the question and everything. (Line 282-284, TI, John)

The classroom observations usually involved observations of one-hour lessons. Cassie and Lisa made expressed her appreciation to Lisa for accommodating a lesson observation for one of her classes. Cassie said to Lisa:

Cassie: 7.30 to 8.30 ok. So thank you for…for being able to be here for today as promised for 1st of March. And as we agreed we go to other classes besides Year 6. So today we will be entering year 4 (looks at the teacher). Here for 10.30 to 11.30 ok. Today we are going to do grammar skill today? (Line 6-9, Co4 Pre, Lisa & Cassie)

The coaches observed the teachers' classroom delivery to provide feedback to the teachers. Coaches used coaching tools to guide their observations (School Management Division, 2017). These tools were Teacher Coaching Tool (TCT) and Teacher Development Tool (TDP). TCT was specifically used by the coaches during the classroom observations to note down coaches' findings on the twelve aspects of teaching, such as lesson planning, delivery and written assessment, just to name a few. Coaches used TDP in post-observation conferences to guide teachers in reflecting on their lessons and teaching practices.

Post-observation Conference. After the coaches' observations on the teachers' classroom instruction, the four dyads reported to commence post-observation conferences. The post-observation conference took place, as Macy described, "based on the classroom observations on the students' learning" (Line 8-9, CF3 Post, Victor & Macy). For example, in

one of the sessions, Edwin discussed about the application of differentiated learning in John's lesson to cater to the diverse learning abilities of the Year 5 students. John then explained about differentiating the activities of the lesson from simple to moderate level of difficulty, based on the multiple proficiency of the students after Edwin appropriately eliciting John's opinions on the teaching materials that he used in his lesson. This was apparent in John and Edwin's conversation:

> Edwin: Alright so let's talk about the materials that you used ah. Emm do you think that the task that you gave them just now can cater to their different learning abilities?
> John: Yes actually. Because the first one about Wright Brothers…actually quite simple la. The Kamquat quite simple actually. For the group work I put it (at) medium level. (Line 42-45, Co2 Post, John & Edwin)

The purpose of the post-observation discussions was to debrief about the coaches' findings regarding the observed lessons. For example, Cassie explained that on top of "look(ing) back at their lesson plan(s)," the coaches' concern would be on "whether the plan(s) had worked out, whether the intended lesson objectives had been achieved, and more importantly, what both the coaches and teachers had learnt from the coaching experience" (Line 294-297, CI, Cassie).

Similar to the pre-observation conferences, in the post-observation conferences, apart from sharing the findings on the observed lessons, the sample of this study was observed to be discussing on other school-related topics. Some of the topics included the Year 6 examination preparation activities, HIP activities, English language district-level and national-level competitions, and English panel discussions (Line 27-29, CF5 Post, Victor & Macy). When discussing on HIP activities in Lisa's school, Lisa shared that she created a big book with her students to teach the alphabet "A." Lisa explained:

> Lisa: (Smiles) Yeah. They are doing this big book actually. So ah I want them to come up with this alphabet. A you draw an A. A is for Apple. I want them to draw A. Apple red. Apple round. Apple sweet. Just simple vocab. (Line 351-354, Co5 Post, Lisa & Cassie)

The post-observation conversations incorporated opportunities for the teachers to recall and reflect on the lesson that they had delivered. Lisa was observed to be a reflective practitioner while Cassie further prompted Lisa to recall about her Year 5 reading lesson, as witnessed in the following conversation:

> Lisa: So number one know and understand new words introduced…so the activities will be discussion of new words introduced sorry oh introduced by the teacher […]
> Cassie: […] how do you measure (how much the students could) understand?
> (Line 42-43, Co2 Post, Lisa & Cassie)

Lisa could explain on the lesson objective and the related activity to achieve the objective in the observed lesson.

During the post-observation conferences, the coaches and teachers negotiated on which areas of the teachers' practice that should be improved. For example, during one occasion, after Della and Helen went through a reflection on Helen's lesson delivery, both identified and agreed that Helen's learning goal was to improve on Helen's lesson planning of the lesson

objectives. Previously, Helen's lesson objectives were not specific on what the students were expected to learn from the lessons. Della encouraged Helen to rephrase the lesson objectives and Helen agreed to make them more specific as observed in their conversations:

> Della: [...] you're going to change this one (Points at the lesson plan) [...] So maybe after you change it you (send) a snapshot to me how you change it…or you want to change it now it's ok. So I think if you change it after this you let me know. [...]
> Helen: Make it more specific. (Line 5-9, Co2 Post, Helen & Della)

This further suggested that the coaching processes aimed to create an avenue for teachers to incorporate their self-reflection on teaching instruction-related issues or problems. Based on the teacher-identified areas of improvement, coaches could begin coaching the teachers on teaching strategies to address the issues or problems.

Intervention. The findings of this study indicated an additional stage which was the intervention stage which would take place after the post-observation conferences and prior to another pre-observation conferences. Two out of four dyads were observed to be engaged in coaching interventions of lesson study and professional discussion. The rest of the dyads chose to continue with another coaching cycle. Through the coaching intervention, issues or problems faced by the teachers in their teaching practice could come to light through the perspective of the teachers.

For the case of Victor and Macy, the intervention was in the form of a lesson study. Victor and Macy identified through one of the post-observation conferences that the issue to be addressed in Victor's Year 4 students would be to encourage the students to "speak and respond" more in English during the lesson (Line 272, Co3 Post, Victor & Macy). Instead of returning to another coaching cycle of pre-observation conference, classroom observation and post-observation conference, Macy and Victor initiated a lesson study which involved all English teachers in the English Panel of Victor's school. With the issue to be addressed in mind in enhancing students' use of the English language, Victor conducted lesson study discussion with the English teachers in planning a lesson which could cater to the learning needs of his students, with the guidance of his coach, Macy. Victor delivered the planned lesson, with the presence and support of not only Macy, but also the other English teachers, to observe Victor's lesson. After the classroom observation, Victor, Macy and the teachers grouped together to discuss and reflect on the lesson. The teachers involved in the lesson study gave constructive comments to Victor to improve students' use of the English language. One of the teachers suggested to involve more students in sharing their answers regarding Victor's queries:

> Macy: Amy? Any comment on any part that you find very good or not good?
> Amy: For the conclusion I like to let more students to come up to write the answers but the others were good.
> Victor: (Takes notes) Meaning you want more students to come up?
> Amy: Yup.
> Macy: More involvement la. (Line 152-156, Co4 Post, Victor & Macy)

Another reason for conducting coaching intervention was to organise professional discussions on the teachers' teaching instructions between the coaches and teachers. For example, John and Edwin met for a discussion which did not involve pre and post-observation conferences and classroom observation. John and Edwin's discussion focused on identifying problems and

issues with regards to "Professional Learning Community (PLC) activities, John's Year 4 and Year 5 students and the CEFR Year 3 curriculum" (Line 1-3, Co4 Post, John & Edwin).

At this stage, the coaches were observed to be further developing teachers' ability to reflect and giving clarification on the suggested teaching strategies and techniques, which were conducted outside pre-observation conferences and post-observation conferences. With lesson study being implemented as one of the intervention strategies in coaching Victor, Victor was observed to be given a platform to practice reflecting on encouraging students' response and involvement in his lesson. He explained:

> Victor: Ah compare with last I mean last lesson with 5M of course, they are I mean... they manage to be more responsive to me. Especially for the conclusion they manage to come to the board to give their answers. And most of them are correct. (Line 22-25, Co4 Post, Victor & Macy)

The coach sample employed coaching interventions to further share, explain and probe on the coaches' suggested teaching strategies which aimed to enhance teachers' delivery of lessons. Edwin shared on the strategy of using project-based learning to address teaching issue of the absence of critical thinking among John's students which John would consider adapting to the needs of his students (Line 17-18, Co4 Post, John & Edwin). It was reasoned that the discussion of teaching strategies was conducted during coaching interventions because of the time constraints in pre-observation conferences and post-observation conferences that hindered coaches to go in-depth in explaining the details of a certain teaching strategy.

Theme 2: Duration of Coaching Support

From the findings, the average dose of coaching was identified to be at least one coaching visit per month. Within one coaching visit, the coach respondents usually went through one coaching cycle with the teachers which involved pre-observation conference, classroom observation and post-observation conference. The pre-observation conferences (M= 49.6), post-observation conferences (M= 45) and intervention (M= 55), averagely took around 45 minutes to one hour in which coaches and teachers made appointments to discuss teaching and lesson-related issues (Figure 2). The "face-to-face" coach-teacher interactions provided a platform for increased contact hours between the coaches and teachers if compared to other forms of coaching such as using social media applications (e.g., WhatsApp). Edwin expressed that the coaching contact hours with John allowed him to deliver, discuss and tackle teaching and lesson-related issues together (Line 433-434, CI, Edwin).
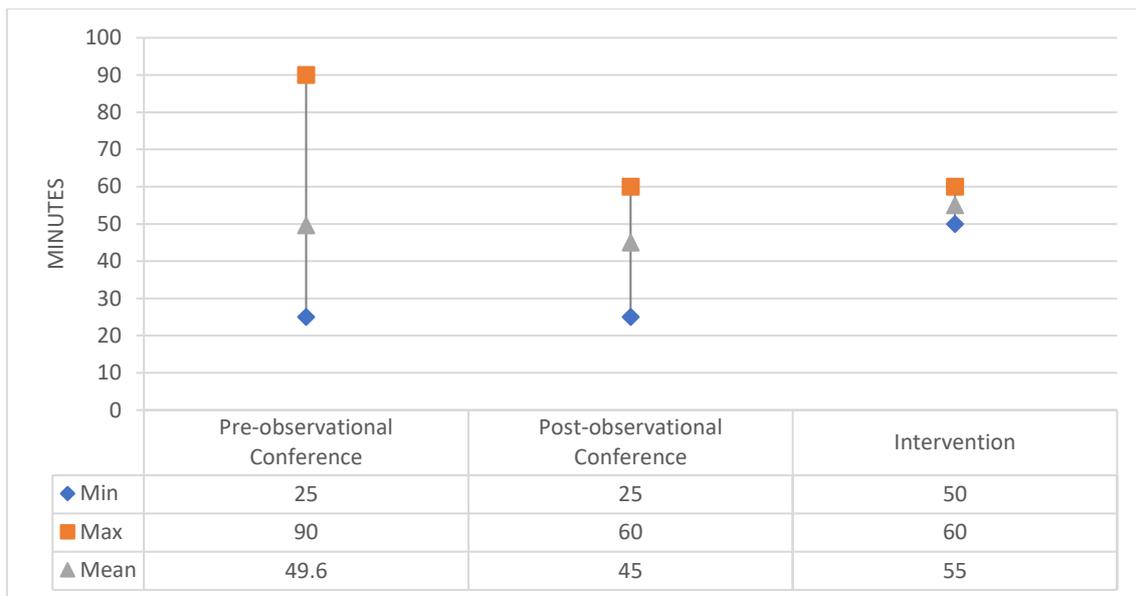
Figure 2. Duration of instructional coaching support in minutes, mean for all coaching sessions

Theme 3: Structure of Coaching Process

In answering research question two, we investigated how the coaching processes were being structured. The findings revealed that in providing professional advice to the teachers, all four coaches were observed to structure the coaching support and carry out the coaching activities in a step-by-step manner during the stages of pre-observation conference, post-observation conference and intervention. The structure of the coaching support is provided in the visual map in Figure 3.
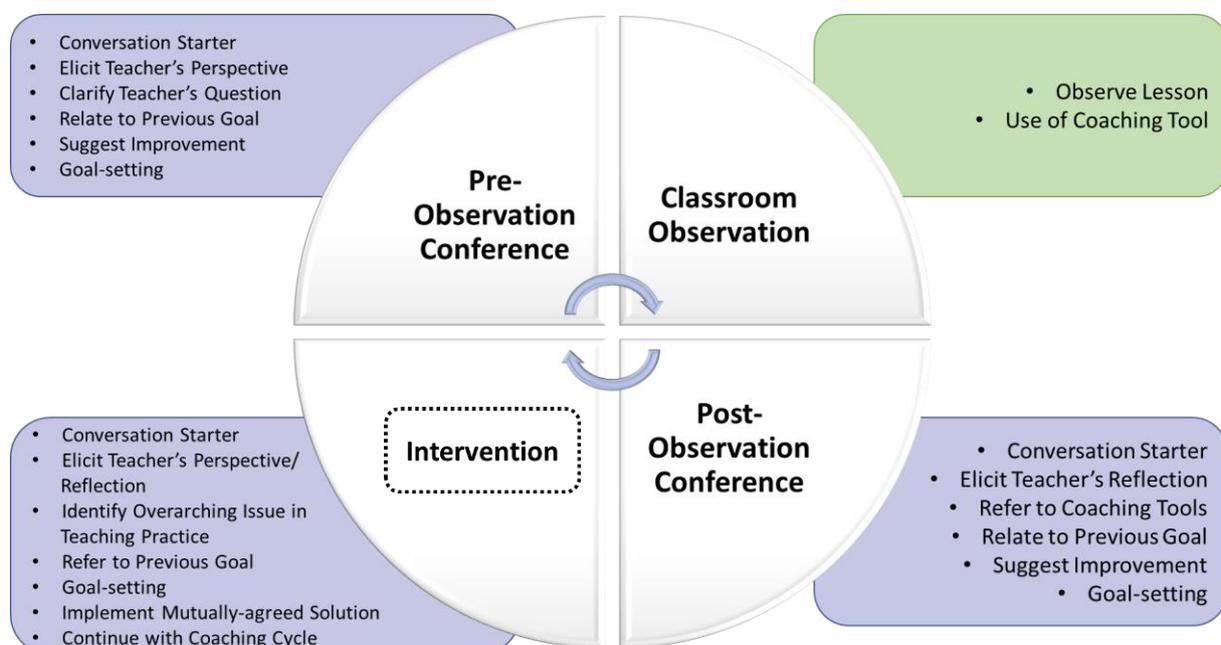

Figure 3. Visual map of coaching activities and the coaching stages.

The pre-observation conference involved the following six steps in structuring the coach-teacher conversation: (a) conversation starter; (b) elicit teacher's perspective; (c) clarify teacher's question; (d) relate to previous goals; (e) suggest improvement; and (f) goal-setting.

For classroom observations, coaching interactions did not occur because teachers were delivering their lessons in the classroom while coaches observed the lessons using coaching tools. As post-observation conferences incorporated discussions on the observed lessons, the coaches focused on eliciting teachers' reflections on their teaching practices while the coaches referred to the coaching tool as evidence of their observations. The post-observation conferences included seven stages: (a) conversation starter; (b) elicit teacher's reflection; (c) refer to coaching tools; (d) relate to previous goal; (e) refer to coaching tool; (f) suggest improvement; and (g) goal-setting. Interventions were intended to address teachers' issues in teaching practice so it would be included in implementing interventions. The seven stages in interventions were: (a) conversation starter; (b) elicit teacher's perspective or reflection; (c) identify overarching issue in teaching practice; (d) refer to previous goal; (e) goal-setting; (f) implement mutually-agreed solution; and (g) continue with coaching cycle.

The identified coaching activities in the pre-observation conferences, post-observation conferences and interventions were by no means definitive in all implementation of coaching discussions. Coaches would either include all the coaching activities in accordance to the sequence within the coaching stages in delivering their coaching support or make necessary modifications and alter the steps based on their unique contexts.

The pre-observation conferences, post-observation conferences and interventions began with the coaches' conversation starter. As observed in the conversation between Victor and Macy, Macy asked questions that were more general at the beginning of the coaching conference, such as "so how's everything?" (Line 9, CF5 Pre, Victor & Macy). This would suggest that the coach respondents intend to listen to and understand what the teachers would like to share rather than directing the conversation to teaching-related matters. Edwin and John's interaction revolved on personal topic of John's Gawai celebration during the start of one of their pre-observation conferences:

> Edwin: Anyway how's your Gawai?
> John: (Smiles)
> Edwin: Funny? It was fantastic?
> John: It's fantastic.
> Edwin: Yeah this year Gawai is actually very…
> John: Yeah the holidays…
> Edwin: Merrier.
> John: Yeah merrier. (Line 22-29, Co2 Pre, John & Edwin)

Through conversation starters, the coaches were building understanding to begin and maintain the coach-teacher conversations in common topics such as the Gawai festival celebrated by the indigenous tribes of Sarawak. Similarly, in a post-observation conference, Cassie did not go straight into "highlighting the flaws of Lisa's lesson" but instead "talked about Lisa's intention to further her studies in the future" (Line 19-21, CF1 Post, Lisa & Cassie).The findings indicated that the structure of the conferences and intervention involved the first step of developing common ground between the coaches and teachers, which would also involve discussing topics outside of teaching.

The coaching conferences and interventions would firstly elicit teachers' perspectives and reflections regarding their current teaching instructions, students' performance and lesson delivery. Lisa commented on her own lesson that she was doing more of drilling on the students' writing skill of constructing short but structurally correct sentences (Line 9-12, Co5 Post, Lisa & Cassie). To elicit teacher's reflection, Macy asked questions like "What are you going to do? Based on the (classroom) observation that we have seen?" (Line 433-434, Coach Interview, Macy). The coaches' effort in exploring teachers' point of views instead of going

through a list of issues and problems that the coaches identified from the observed lessons had created opportunity for coaches to understand teachers' issues and to come to terms with teachers on areas to be changed. As explained by Edwin:

> Edwin: […] Let's see if what (the teachers) think about (their lessons) is also in line or align with my opinion […] so after that I will share (my opinion) ok (Line 298-299, Coach Interview, Edwin)

The teachers' self-reflection pushed them to think about their practices and choose purposefully from the ideas suggested by the coaches to improve their practices. As explained by Victor:

> Victor: Ah of course from (my) reflection I know what my weaknesses are. And then of course I have to use the ideas which come from the discussion. I'll try to implement in the ah next lesson. (Line 353-354, Teacher Interview, Victor)

The teachers' self-reflection guided the post-observation conferences as the coaches provided teachers with suggestions. Through the negotiations of ideas coming from both parties, the coaches and teachers reached to a consensus on the areas and how to best improve teaching instructions. The teachers then acted upon the agreed improvements by implementing the suitable teaching strategies.

Goal-setting was one of the pivotal steps within the pre-observation conferences, post-observation conferences and interventions. The teachers' learning goals to improve their teaching practices were determined through the coaches and teachers' discussions. The goals were not prescribed by the coaches because the coaches and the teachers "worked towards reaching consensus on two aspects of learning to be focused on in the TDP (coaching tool)" (Line 21-24, CF3 Post, Helen & Della).

Discussion

Coaching Cycle

The coaching cycle employed by the coach and teacher sample in this study consisted of pre-observation conferences, classroom observations and post-observation conferences, as congruent with the coaching models that described the coaching processes as a three-stage cycle (Knight et al., 2015; Snyder et al., 2015; Teemant, 2014). Particularly, this research suggested an additional stage of intervention to address problems or issues confronted in the teachers' practices which could not be effectively addressed during the coaching conferences due to time constraints and other challenges.

Instructional coaching is a TPD process that requires time (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Instructional coaches need to invest time to set measurable goals that matter to the teachers and choose suitable teaching strategies with the teachers in the attempt to achieve the learning goals (Knight et al., 2015). More time would be required in making sure teachers get a clear understanding and fully internalise the teaching strategies to reach the important goals. Too often, coaches expected teachers to understand and implement the teaching strategies in the next coaching cycle after the first introduction. Explanation introduces practices to teachers, but for teachers to implement them fluently would require a coaching intervention, such as through the coaches' modelling of the strategies (Knight & van Nieuwerburgh, 2012). With the intervention stage, coaches and teachers in this study could confront the coaching challenge of time constraint in providing coaching support by having more time to attend to issues in teaching practices through lesson study and in-depth coach-teacher discussion. Once teachers

gain enough confidence in teaching using the recommended strategy, coaches could continue with the coaching cycle—pre-observation conference, classroom observation, and post-observation conference to determine whether the teachers' learning goal has been achieved through their use of the strategy.

The finding of this study that uncovered that coaching visits were conducted once a month did not resonate the previous study by Snyder et al. (2015) which revealed that the planned dose of coaching support would be around one session per week. On the same note, Anderson et al. (2014) uncovered that coaching consisted of weekly collaborative sessions. The respondents of this study engaged in the coaching cycles in a lower frequency of coaching support of one session per month. The differences in the dosage of coaching support between the local context and international studies might be due to the ratio of coaches and the schools that the coaches are assigned to. For example, Anderson et al. (2014) explained that the implementation of coaching programme in the district is designed as one coach to be working full-time in one or two schools that the coach is attached to, in which usually the coach would be coaching in the school which they have previously taught. In the Malaysian context, the coaches would be attached to the District Education Office and they are responsible for the schools that have coaching needs in the district (School Management Division, 2017). We did not identify the effective coach to teacher ratio or the perfect dosage of coaching support that would contribute to better school outcomes and we suggest future studies of using causal methods would be more suitable to yield the intended result.

The respondents were observed to be adhering to the coaching processes as stipulated in the DTP 3.0 Management Guideline by: (a) conducting coaching observations, (b) conducting post-coaching conferences based on TCT coaching tool, and (c) supporting teacher development using TDP coaching tool (School Management Division, 2017, p. 28). However, the coaching guideline relied on the coaching practitioner's jurisdiction in deciding the most suitable coaching model in performing coaching support. The results of this study extended on how the coaching processes could be conducted by providing a coaching model that depicted the coaching processes based on evidences gathered on the actual and on-the-ground coaching practice.

Structuring Coaching Conversations

From the findings of the study, structuring coaching conversations was a key aspect in conducting coaching support for the teachers. It was essential to first start the coaching conversations by understanding the perspectives of the teachers to work on goals based on mutual consensus. By getting to know teachers' point of view, ideas and reflections, coaches could establish a common ground with the teachers to further develop their coaching conversations. According to Knight and van Nieuwerburgh (2012), even if coaches explain the aspects of a teaching strategy, they would explain that the strategy may need to be adapted to be best suited to the needs of the unique classroom context, rather than adopting the strategy entirely as it is. Relevant to the findings of Knight and van Nieuwerburgh (2012), the steps in structuring the discussions in the coaching cycle—the pre-observation conferences, post-observation conferences, and interventions, eliciting teachers' perspective and reflection would be the first few steps in the coach-teacher discussions. The findings of this study differ from the coaching system suggested by Hunt (2016), who described a contrasting coaching system which works within the influence of pastoral power. According to Hunt (2016), teachers comply to coaches' directives because coaches are seen to hold higher power over the teachers or as the competent others in coaching while the teachers enact a subordinate role to follow instructions to change their practices. The teachers in this study were discovered to experience Hunt's (2016) idea of "conditions of vulnerability" to some extent when coaches conducted

classroom observations on the teachers' lessons. However, the respondents of this study did not report the overtly directive role of the coaches in delivering their coaching support, suggesting that authoritative coaches who dominate coach-teacher conversations without taking teachers' point of view into considerations was not an issue in this coaching implementation. Nevertheless, future research into what constituents of coach-teacher dialogue would merit the coaching literature.

According to Knight (2011), being intentional about finding common ground with teachers and focusing on establishing relationship are important parts to effective coaching. Both the coaches and teachers would bring different coaching expectations to the table, for instance, on how coaching should be like (Hoffman et al., 2015; Jacobs et al., 2017). This could be reasoned that each coach and teacher bring into the coaching partnership their unique presumptions shaped by their personality, their beliefs about coaching, teaching and learning, to name a few. Based on this core belief, the findings inferred that the coaches ensured that the coaching discussions were based on the teachers' perspectives of the teachers' current teaching instructions, students' performance and lesson delivery, in line with the emphasis on teachers' learning needs in the coaching literature (Bean et al., 2010; Snyder et al., 2015; Vogt & Rogalla, 2009). Correlational studies to further test the relationship between the building understanding, time invested in coaching support and improvement in teacher practice are pivotal follow-up to this study to find out the effects of these variables.

Research Implication

From this study, the findings reveal several practical implications worthy of future investigations. In our investigation into how instructional coaching look like in the context of Sarawak, East Malaysia, we described the coaching processes by identifying the frequency of coaching support, explaining the stages in the coaching cycle and uncovering how the coaching discussions were structured. The attempt to expand knowledge in the area of coaching processes is in line with the coaching research envisioned by Desimone and Pak (2017) who suggested to further refine the understanding of coaching and how coaching should be implemented to allow TPD.

The systemic steps identified in the coaching stages would provide useful references for the coaches in their coaching practice. We argued that coaching practitioners should develop an understanding of the structure of the coaching conferences and interventions before the "real work" of coaching begins. We believe that this result could be helpful to coaches in designing and implementing of coaching support. Teachers would benefit from the findings by understanding the execution of coaching processes and to play their roles with regards to the expectations through the stages in coaching.

We agreed with the recommendations of Denton and Hasbrouck (2009) of the professional development need for coaches in terms of coaching skills and competencies to enhance the effectiveness coaching consultation. Stakeholders in coach training, such as the national, state and district level DTP coordinators of the coaching programme could provide more specific trainings to the coaches. Working in the related field of professional training for coaches, Gallucci Van Lare, Yoon, and Boatright (2010) identified professional development activities which ranged from formal trainings which integrate the study of instruction to observation sessions of model coaching. More importantly, Gallucci et al. (2010) found that coaches often "learn on the job" to be effective in their coaching roles and are "ostensibly hired as experts" to provide coaching support to teachers (p. 953). With this gap in coaching training in mind, it could be suggested that the professional development for coaches to be focused in the area of the planning of the coaching cycle, developing effective coaching interventions to address recurring teaching-related issues, how coaching conversation could be initiated

successfully, how teachers' perspective and reflection could be elicited and goal setting, to name a few. We suggest that coaches' training on coaching content should be paired with coach-teacher relationship establishing skills such as in how mutual understanding could be built between the coaches and teachers. Coaching preparation, especially to novice coaches, may emphasise in training the key interpersonal coaching skills (Lowenhaupt, McKinney, & Reeves, 2014).

The coaching literature highlights the complexities of the coaching processes (Jacobs et al., 2017). Our research into the processes of coaching indicates important insights to not to underestimate the complexity of a coach's work. With a limited amount of time, a coach has to swiftly move the coach-teacher discussions from the data gathered from a teacher's lesson to negotiating mutually agreed learning goal based on the teacher's reflection and the coach's suggested teaching strategies. Identifying the structure of the coaching support and coaching activities that really works in providing support to the teachers poses a great challenge to the coaches but is well-worth the amount of time invested in. Through careful structuring the coaching conferences and interventions, enabling teacher learning through instructional coaching would not be a worthwhile endeavour in teacher professional development.

The fact that this study was based on the findings of our qualitative case study which employed self-selection sampling, we are not claiming any generalisability of our results on the coaching processes as it is not being representative of the population of the coaches and teachers being studied. We also recognise the limitations of our study in determining other variables that were not investigated in our study, especially on the factors that could contribute towards coach-teacher partnership and consequently leading to the practice and sustainability of new teaching practices. However, from the findings we could make a few recommendations for the future direction of research. First, it would be valuable to extend the study on how the effectiveness of the coaching programme would be influenced with the addition of the intervention stage in the coaching cycle. Such work can contribute to the improvement process within the coaches' work, as highlighted by Kane and Rosenquist (2019). Second, considering the qualitative nature of this study which employs observations and semi-structured interviews as its data collection methods, it is important to further test the theories against independent empirical information using other research designs (Chibucos, Leite, & Weis, 2005). More specifically, the coaching literature would benefit from future studies based on comprehensive theories and empirical evidences into the development of fully-articulated models of instructional coaching in the Malaysian context. Third, as this study investigated one-to-one coaching model, other alternatives to instructional coaching and how coaching collaboration could be promoted would warrant further research to provide the differentiated experiences of coaching that teachers deserve.

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Appendix

Interview Questions for the Coaches
1. Would you briefly describe your coaching experience?
2. How often do you meet your teacher(s) per month?
3. Talk to me about your first experience of working with the teacher.
4. Describe how the coaching process is being implemented.
(Probe: What are the stages in the coaching cycle?)
5. What are the steps taken in coaching the teachers?
6. Is there anything that you would like to add regrading the coaching process and coaching challenges?
(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

Interview Questions for the Teachers
1. Would you briefly describe your teaching background and experience?
2. How often do you meet your coach per month?
3. Talk to me about your first experience of working with a coach.
4. Describe how the coaching process is being implemented.
(Probe: What are the stages in the coaching cycle?)
5. What are the steps taken in by your coach in the coaching process?
6. Is there anything that you would like to add regrading the coaching process and coaching challenges?
(Thank the individuals for their cooperation and participation in this interview. Assure them of the confidentiality of the responses and the potential for future interviews.)

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Article Citation

Hui, K. S., Khemanuwong, T., & Ismail, S. A. M. M. (2020). Keeping teachers afloat with instructional coaching: Coaching structure and implementation. *The Qualitative Report, 25*(7), 1790-1816. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss7/5