

# Instructional Leadership Best Practices in Coaching toward Bukit Jalil Sports School Excellence

Zulyadi Zakaria

Bukit Jalil Sport School, Malaysia

Salmy Edawati Yaacob

Sharia Research Centre, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Huszaidi Hussin, Farhan Nazihah Ahmad

Bukit Jalil Sport School, Malaysia

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## Abstract

Instructional leadership is a model that is often used in managing and administrating a school to influence, guide, and motivate teachers and students towards school excellence. Diverse family backgrounds, religion, and race are significant challenges for coaches and Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS) administrators to spur student athletes' excellence in sports. Therefore, the purpose of this write-up is to share the best practices in BJSS from the aspects of; i- monitoring and assessment of coaches' and student athletes' performance ii- producing excellent coaches with calibre in their sports iii- applying of 3R element among coaches iv- consolidation of spiritual component among student-athletes. Implementing best practices is based on a few strategies, including centralised documentation, executing the lead by example concept, empowering sports coaching, concentration in sports development programs, internationalisation with sports excellence centres from overseas, and self-empowerment in student-athletes. This paper produced four aspects of best practices with the implementation of some programs, which are; a standard and organised documentation system, yearly training program presentations, coaching mentoring program, workshops by Master Coaches, specific sports skills clinic, development of training modules, international sports collaboration program and spiritual based program. The impact of these programs will be able to optimise students' outcomes, enhance the coaching profession and produce student-athletes with principles and identities. This achievement is aligned with aspirations stated in Wave 3 of National Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which drives *Sekolahku SEJAHTERA*.

**Keywords:** Instructional Leadership, Sports School, Coaching, Student-Athlete.

**Introduction**

Malaysia Sports Schools are sports school programs under the Ministry of Education Malaysia aimed to assemble potential and talented student-athletes and hone their potential towards excellence. The staffs consist of qualified coaches and dedicated teachers. Through systematic and efficient monitoring, academic and sports performances can be balanced and integrated. Ministry of Education Malaysia has highlighted the importance of sports and extracurricular activities to produce balanced student-athletes in terms of their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellect. Sports Schools are similar to Boarding Schools by giving attention to the following concepts: i- the development of world-class athletes, ii- training by professional coaches, iii- across-curricular specialisation of Sports Science, and iv, emphasis on sports as a career. Bukit Jalil Sports School (BJSS) was established in 1996 and was the pioneer sports school in Malaysia. The central vision of BJSS is that 'BJSS generates world-class athletes.'

Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) was developed to ensure the education system's effectiveness and sustainability transformation. Among the main objectives is to ensure high-performance leaders lead all schools. School leaders must be innovative and ready to do their roles as instructional leaders without being burdened by overloaded administrative tasks. The role of the instructional leader seems realistic and can be an indicator of determining the desired education excellence. Hallinger and Murphy (1995) defined instructional leadership as all the actions made by the principal to ensure success and further development or enhance the school teaching and learning process involving teachers, students, and parents. Previous studies proved that the most crucial element determining whether a school's leader can be categorised as effective or not is their ability to fulfil their roles as instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2015; Haris et al., 2018; Ahmad, 2019 & Rahman, 2021). In this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, instructional leadership needs to create a long-lasting teaching and learning environment by encouraging teachers to explore, enquire and discuss best practices to ensure students' and school's excellence.

Alig-Mielcarek's (2003) instructional leadership model explains that a leader needs to identify and disseminate common goals, control and give feedback towards the teaching and learning process, and generate school professional development. Looking at this dimension, the formation of vision and mission is a base for producing a common goal and lacing all efforts in school. Determining the school's vision and mission is the principal's responsibility to achieve the school's purpose. Sharing the school's vision and mission frequently, formally and informally, to parents and the local community enables the vision and mission to be understood, appreciated, and wholly achievable. A leader must collaborate with staff to identify and explain school goals. These goals will guide decision-making in the organisation, determining teaching practices, purchasing curricular materials, and generating targets to enhance academic achievements or organisational performance.

Therefore, to empower and realise Malaysia National Sports School's agenda, instructional leadership in coaching must be given extra attention so that Malaysia National Sports School, especially BJSS, can maintain its direction and, as a result, the outcome of excellent student-athletes at the national and international level. According to a study by Hashim and Sahrin (2018) about school and impactful or effective leadership, a more complex school organisation must change its practices and ability to adapt in terms of leadership.

Changes in education include reactions to problems, changes in policy, and people's desires. Principals and coaches need to be ready to face changes in education with results that can trigger and move the organisation to live further, expand and excel (Ibrahim & Hamzah, 2012). In BJSS, best instructional leadership practices are shared as guidance with other National Sports Schools. So, this write-up is aimed to share best practices based on instructional leadership in BJSS to prod student athletes' excellent performance in their sports.

### **Statement of Problem**

In Malaysia, there are five National Sports Schools. They are Bukit Jalil Sports School, Tunku Mahkota Ibrahim Sports School, Terengganu Sports School, Pahang Sports School and Sabah Sports School. The uniqueness of Malaysia National Sports Schools is that it stresses sports performances without neglecting academic achievement. It is not a surprise if National Sports School always faces problems in administrating and managing as it is not similar to other schools.

Coaching is a very complex and challenging field that is also new in the Ministry of Education Malaysia. The Ministry of Education has introduced specific posts in the field of coaching since 2005. These posts only carry duties as coaches without having to teach any subjects in class. For that reason, coaches need to intensify their empowerment of knowledge from time to time, hence their competency and ability to carry out their duty (Desa & Salamuddin, 2022). Documentation and filing are issues among BJSS coaches. It is not uniform and unorganised. Consequently, monitoring and assessment are a challenge for administrators.

In the early days, BJSS student athletes' outcomes were commendable; however, of late, the existence of competition from other National Sports Schools and State Sports Schools affected the selection of potential student-athletes. In order to sustain being the best sports excellence centre, BJSS coaches must constantly increase their competency to be the best in their sports. Thus, the cultivation of excellence in coaches must be practised as they are the model to other sports schools. Therefore, programs in coaching must always be empowered in BJSS. To become an excellent student athlete in both discipline academic & sport requires time, commitment and systematic training plan. Optimum adaptation of training programme requires balancing between stress and recovery. The student athlete must balance all these demands with the additional requirements of an academic programme. This can bring unique stresses and challenges. There for, BJSS need to have special system to encounter this situation among their students. Coaches and academic teachers also must work together to produce excellent student athlete.

The main agenda in establishing BJSS is to have a system of education emphasising academics and sports in parallel. Besides, BJSS is also an institution that has developed programs at the school level. In that event, BJSS is the best in organising sports development programs and has become a reference to other sports schools. Nonetheless, BJSS needs to streamline a few of its coaching aspects involving sports training modules, reference materials or academic writings, sports development programs, and indicators of producing knowledgeable student-athletes (thinking athletes). Thus, the need to inculcate the 3R element (Relevant, Referred, Respected) among coaches is essential to put BJSS as the best centre of excellence in sports development, especially in Malaysia.

Students' outcomes are different. Patriotism and a highly competitive spirit are the values in every student to be an athlete. Physical and tactical strategies are not the only factors influencing an athlete's performance in a tournament. The spiritual element also plays an essential role. It is undeniable that tournament psychology is one of the contributing factors to success and good performance. Psychology and actions include performance motives, intelligence, self-actualisation, identity, aggressiveness, emotions, self-confidence, motivation, high spirit, responsibility, social skills, desire to win, and many more (Effendi, 2016). Instilling spiritual values will full dependency on God is a process of strengthening student athletes' identity. Therefore, instilling spiritual intelligence in student-athletes has become a challenge that must be given extra attention by coaches and student-athletes coming from various family backgrounds, religions, and races. Hence, instilling spiritual elements is essential in spurring excellence in student athletes' outcomes in BJSS. The objectives of this write-up are to share: best practices in monitoring and assessing coaches' and student athletes' performance, best practices in producing coaches with the calibre and excellence in their fields, best practices in instilling the 3R element among coaches and best practices in consolidating spirituality among student-athletes.

### **Implementation**

Implementation of best practices is based on numerous strategies used

- i- Centralized documentation is where data is gathered in a system and arranged uniformly and easily accessed.
- ii- Execution of the 'led by example' concept. Mentoring is an in-service training program using knowledge-sharing skills and experience (tacit knowledge) between experienced and knowledgeable coaches and newly appointed coaches.
- iii- Empowering sports coaching. Empowering strategies in sports coaching are aimed at increasing the professional coaching level. Referring to BJSS's vision of 'Generate World Class Athletes', its coaches need to have the best standard of coaching.
- iv- Consolidation in the sports development program. School-level sports development programs boost the quality and quantity of students' involvement in sports. This program will be a platform for students to develop their talent other than instilling good moral values such as good sportsmanship and a strong identity or personality.
- v- Collaboration with overseas sports excellence centres is an approach to building networking and relationships with outside professionals. This relationship covers cooperation in empowering or consolidating sports programs and facilitates all aspects involving sports development programs.
- vi- Self consolidate among student-athletes is to empower programs that can give add-on values to their self-value. Emphasis on programs that consolidate strong personality, identity, and religious beliefs is crucial.

### **Best Practice in Monitoring and Assessing Coaches' and Student Athletes' Performances.**

Best practice in monitoring and assessing coaches' and student athletes' performances is done by implementing four programs:

#### *i- Implementing standard and organised documentation.*

BJSS has introduced centralised documentation among coaches. A specific file for all coaches was given to manage all data on sports programs.

*ii- Uniformed components in the coaches' file. The file consists of*

- a- Coaches Biodata
- b- Student Athletes' Biodata
- c- Student Athletes' Performance Profile
- d- Tournament Schedules
- e- Training Schedules
- f- Yearly Training Programs
- g- Weekly Training Programs
- h- Daily Training Programs
- i- Student Athletes' Attendance
- j- Injuries Record
- k- Fitness Test Record
- l- Skill Test Report
- m- Tournament Report
- n- Student Athletes' Yearly Report

All these components are organised and use uniform standards. This strategy introduced by BJSS administrators has made it easy to monitor and assess the progress of coaches and student-athletes.

*iii- Standardised format for reports and proposals.*

The standard format of writing the proposal for sports-related programs and application of monetary allocation ease administrators in checking and approving the applications. The structured format is aligned with items that must be in all applications.

*iv- Yearly training program presentation.*

This presentation is on yearly training programs. Its purpose is to ensure that student-athletes are at their peak for the planned tournament. To further improve, administrators have set that all coaches must present their yearly training plans early in the year. Presentations will be evaluated by the Heads of Departments, the Principal, and the Vice Principal in charge of sports. Training programs presented will be evaluated in terms of technical and manageability from the administrators' perspectives. The coaches will make any form of improvement on the presented training programs before being endorsed by school administrators. This strategy is aimed to enhance the planning of training programs for each coach, which will result in optimising student athletes' outcomes.

### **Best Practice in Producing Calibre and Excellent Coaches**

Best practice in producing calibre and excellent coaches in BJSS is implemented using three main strategies:

*i- Mentoring Program*

Mentoring concept is applied to 26 coaches (2022) in BJSS. The coaches vary from senior coaches with vast experience in coaching; at the same time newly appointed coaches join the coaching profession. To guarantee the continuity of sports excellence in BJSS, the mentoring program is established where the senior coaches will be the mentor to new coaches. They will guide and expose aspects that solidify them in the profession. To maximise the effectiveness of this approach, the mentor will also be determined from the same sports. The school

administrators will always be given feedback from mentors on the development of their mentees.

*ii- Master Coach Workshop*

School administrators aim to produce as many Master Coaches as possible, from DG grade 44 to DG grade 52. In 2021, a volleyball coach was appointed the Master Coach of DG grade 52. In 2022, a cricket coach was appointed Master Coach with DG grade 48. A few workshops were held to guide and motivate coaches to become Master Coaches or be at their best form. BJSS Master Coaches facilitated this series of workshops.

*iii- Specific Sports Academic Writing Workshop.*

The development of coaching knowledge is very dynamic. The advancement and innovation in training methods move with time. In efforts to boost coaches to be abreast with current development, they are encouraged to produce academic write-ups concerning their sports. Through this process, coaches will constantly be updated on current coaching knowledge and eventually encourage knowledge-seeking culture among BJSS coaches.

**Best Practices in Applying 3R Element among Coaches**

Best practices in applying the 3R element among BJSS coaches are done through four main programs:

*i- Specific Sports Skill Clinic*

In BJSS, sports development programs focus more on expanding student athletes' existing talent to a higher level. The search for new talents must be updated to have maximum student-athlete involvement at the school level. BJSS has organised a few programs, among others, the specific sports skill, namely, Netball Skills and Techniques Clinic. This clinic's target students were primary and lower secondary school students. BJSS experienced coaches conducted the clinic.

*ii- New Talent Identification Program*

Talent identification program and talent scouting is streamlined and expanded in search of new raw talents among school students. BJSS coaches have carried out this program according to zones set in selected states in Malaysia. BJSS coaches will also scout at the state and national competitions to look out for potential student-athletes. Potential student-athletes will be offered a place in BJSS.

*iii- Development of Sports Training Module*

BJSS is developing Sports Training Modules for all sports offered in BJSS, Ministry of Education Malaysia. The sports are Netball, Volleyball, Cricket, Athletics, and others. The development of training modules is crucial as it will be an essential reference for coaches to plan each training program. Module item builders are among coaches with vast experience and calibre on top of the involvement of the Curriculum Development Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia. These modules will be referred to in the future for all institutions related to sports development programs.



*iv- Collaboration Program- Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, and Australia.*

Internationalised program is aligned to make BJSS the best centre of excellence for sports in Malaysia. Through collaborative programs with sports with excellent sports centres from Thailand, Indonesia, and Australia, it is hoped that sharing and broadening ideas on the latest coaching knowledge and sports development programs to improve training sessions and participation in tournaments further. Joining training sessions for student-athletes and coaches' sharing sessions will enhance student-athlete's techniques and coaching strategies.

**Best Practices in Strengthening Spiritual Values in Student-Athletes**

Best practices in strengthening spiritual values among BJSS student-athletes are implemented through two programs:

*i- Teambuilding and Leadership Camps - Collaboration between Guidance and Counselling Unit and coaches of BJSS.*

BJSS student-athletes come from different religions, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds. High-impact programs are needed to produce student-athletes with principles and high competency. Coaches work hand in hand with Guidance and Counselling unit structured programs such as teambuilding programs, leadership camps, unity camps, and many more. This collaboration is crucial to make these programs successful.

*ii- Empowerment of Prayers among Student-Athletes*

Islam cares about well-being; the key to well-being is to perform five obligatory prayers. *Salat* (prayers) teaches discipline in time management. This is the best approach, as excellent student-athletes are wise in managing their time. The lack of spiritual embracement and religious knowledge in BHSS is an aspect that needs to be addressed in order to prepare student-athletes for future challenges. During competitions, they must be highly competitive to compete against their opponents. All these require strength and high dependency on God. Student-athletes who always perform their prayers will be granted a sense of peace and solid spiritual values in them.

**Discussion**

The unorganised assessment and monitoring process in BJSS made it challenging to determine the strengths and weaknesses of coaches. As a centralised documentation strategy has been practised since 2015, it has made documentation more systematic. Therefore, weaknesses among coaches can be identified, and focussed improvement can be made where coaches with calibre can be put forward and guided to be acknowledged as Master Coach by the Ministry of Education Malaysia. A study made by Mohd & Dom (2017) stresses a centralised and organised document or data management. This study also gives attention to digitalisation in document management that is suitable and parallel to current technological advancements. BJSS needs to be well equipped with a centralised documentation system and incorporate digitalisation in implementing paperless recording or reporting.

Calibre and Master Coaches are produced from the show of knowledge they have and their expertise in their sports. Knowledge and experience sharing among coaches must be a norm. Mentoring program is seen as the best approach to achieving quality coaches. Through this program, coaches recognised with potential are guided to achieve the best professional level in coaching. Coaches with high competency will produce systematic and effective

training programs; hence student-athlete outcomes will be optimised. This is aligned with a study by Sucipto et al (2017), where student-athletes performance, attitude, psychology and emotion is the reflection of positivity projected by competent coaches. Bompalao (2009) stated that well-executed training sessions would result in excellent tournament outcomes.

The 3R element concept has three elements: Relevant, Referred and Respected. This concept is widely imparted in many organisations. A few universities have introduced this concept in the education sector in their organisation, namely, National University Malaysia and Malaysia Science University. BJSS is more acknowledged now as there are active collaborations between BJSS and national sports associations as in Malaysia Cricket Association, Malaysia Basketball Association, and Malaysia Netball Association. There are also a few private sectors, such as Allianz Insurance, collaborating with our Badminton Team in addition to Ajinomoto (M) Bhd. with our dietetic unit. These collaborations ensure the success of all development programs planned and implemented.

BJSS student-athletes come from many different families, religions, and racial backgrounds. This variation challenges coaches and BJSS administrators to plan programs to strengthen their identity and inculcate good moral values. Packing everyday routine with academic classes and training sessions in BJSS should not be an excuse for Muslim student-athletes to neglect their five obligatory *salat* (prayers). Emphasis on the importance of firm devotion to religious teaching is constantly reminded during the school's weekly assembly. Coaches and teachers constantly repeat it during training and in classes. Many exemplary athletes held firm to their faith always being shared, such as stories of Muhammad Ali, the legendary boxer and Nor Saiful Zaini, our Malaysia National Hockey captain, who brought his team to qualify for the Summer Olympics in 1992, 1996, and 2000. Administrators, Guidance and Counselling Unit and coaches must always cooperate and collaborate in structuring a self-enhancement program to produce balanced student-athletes in terms of intellectual, physical, spiritual, and emotional.

Best practices in implementing instructional leadership have led to BJSS student athletes' success. The performance record of student-athletes in BJSS between 2018 and 2019 has shown tremendous success.

Table 1

*BJSS Student-Athletes Involvement in National Level Tournament Year 2018 and 2019*

Performance Report of BJSS Student-Athletes National Level			
YEAR	ENROLMENT (Form 1 – PraUniversiti)	TARGET	ACTUAL ACHIEVEMENT
2018	402 student athletes	85 %	95.02 %
2019	437 student athletes	85 %	98.17 %



Table 2

*BJSS Student-Athletes Involvement in International Level Tournament Year 2018 and 2019*

Performance Report of BJSS Student-Athletes International Level			
YEAR	ENROLMENT (Form 4 – PraUniversiti)	TARGET	ACTUAL ACHIEVEMENT
2018	275 student athletes	50 %	50.55 %
2019	282 student athletes	50 %	50.35 %

**Implication**

The implication of instructional leadership best practices has resulted in many crucial implications for BJSS.

1. Efficient monitoring and assessment process of training programs by school administrators.
2. Effective and systematic training programs for student-athletes.
3. Optimising student-athlete outcomes in national and international level tournaments.
4. Empower the coaching profession and produce as many Master Coaches.
5. Academic sharing and expansion of academic discourse in coaching among coaches.
6. Constant improvement of BJSS sports development programs aligns with the advancement of time.
7. Continuity in producing student-athletes who excel at national and international levels.
8. BJSS to be a reference for sports programs to other educational institutions or agencies.
9. Coaches and student-athletes are role models due to their knowledge and quality.
10. Produce student-athletes who have principles and strong identities.
11. Supreme position of Islam as the official religion of Malaysia.

**Summary and Conclusion**

BJSS is a school based on its sports development programs. *Sekolahku SEJAHTERA* aims to produce an excellent young generation with the ability to be competitive globally. It also corresponds to the implication of instructional leadership best practices toward BJSS excellence. These achievements are congruent with the aspirations in Wave 3 of National Education Blueprint 2013-2025, which later initiated *Sekolahku SEJAHTERA*.

Table 3

*Summary of Discussion*

AIMS/ OBJEKTIVE/KPI	STRATEGY	INITIATIVE/ PROGRAM	IMPLICATION
<b>(1)</b> Best practice in monitoring and assessing coaches' and student athletes' performances	Centralised documentation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implementing standard and organised documentation</li> <li>2. Uniformed components in the coaches' file.</li> <li>3. A standardised format for reports and proposals</li> <li>4. Yearly training program presentation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Efficient monitoring and assessment process of training programs by school administrators.</li> <li>2. Effective and systematic training programs for student-athletes.</li> <li>3. Optimising student-athlete's outcomes in national and international level tournaments.</li> </ol>
<b>(2)</b> Best practice in producing calibre and excellent coaches.	<p>Execution of the 'led by example' concept.</p> <p>Empowering sports coaching</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mentoring Program (Mentor &amp; Mentee)</li> <li>2. Master Coach Workshop</li> <li>3. Specific Sports Academic Writing Workshop</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Empower the coaching profession and produce as many Master Coaches.</li> <li>2. Continuity in producing student-athletes who excel at national and international levels.</li> <li>3. Academic sharing and expansion of academic discourse in coaching among coaches.</li> </ol>
<b>(3)</b> Best practices in applying the 3R element among BJSS coaches.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consolidation in the sports development program</li> <li>2. Collaboration with oversea sports excellence centres.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Specific Sports Skill Clinic</li> <li>2. New Talent Identification Program</li> <li>3. Development of Sports Training Module</li> <li>4. Collaboration Program- Indonesia, Thailand,</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Constant improvement of BJSS sports development programs align with the advancement of time.</li> <li>2. BJSS to be a reference for sports programs to other educational institutions or agencies</li> </ol>

		Singapore, and Australia.	3. Coaches and student-athletes are role models due to their knowledge and quality
(4) Best practices in strengthening spiritual values among BJSS student-athletes.	Self-consolidate among student-athletes is to empower programs that can give add-on values to their self-value	1. Teambuilding and Leadership Camps - Collaboration between Guidance and Counselling Unit and coaches of BJSS. 2. Empowerment of Prayers among Student-Athletes	1. Produce student-athletes who have principles and strong identities. 2. Supreme position of Islam as the official religion of Malaysia

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